

Wildflower Planting Guide

Successful use of wildflowers in landscaping depends on good planting and maintenance practices. With the application of a few basic rules, wildflowers can provide a beautiful and colorful display in your garden or flower bed.

Site Selection

When selecting a proper site for your wildflowers, pay close attention to existing vegetation. If you have a site that has been used for a garden or a large open flower bed, establishing your seedlings will be easier. If your site has been a weedy or grassy area it will need more preparation. Your site should receive at least six hours a day of full sunshine. Try to avoid wet areas or low areas that may have accumulated weed seed. These areas will promote weed growth that may compete with your flowers.

Site Preparation

The single most important thing you can do to ensure success in establishing your wildflowers is proper site preparation. If the site has existing vegetation it must be controlled before planting. This may be a lengthy process. Be sure to start early enough to allow for proper planting time.

The most successful method to remove existing vegetation is with the use of non-selective herbicides such as Round-up®. Apply the herbicide following the label recommendations when the vegetation is actively growing. After ten days to two weeks mow and rake up the dead material. If the site is heavily compacted, shallow tillage is needed. Avoid deeply disturbing the soil as this will bring up more dormant weed seeds. If the soil does not require tillage, rake the soil to loosen the top one to two inches.

Water the site for an additional week to help germinate the new weed seeds. When the new weeds have reached two to three inches of growth, repeat the herbicide application. If the use of herbicides is not desired, weeds may be controlled by tillage. Repeated tillage throughout the growing season will provide some weed control. Other methods such as hand pulling or close mowing may have some success.

Planting the Seeds

After weed control and site preparation, seeding may start. The bed should be firm enough that walking on the site will not allow sinking more than a half inch. If the soil is too loose, walking or lightly tamping the soil will achieve the required density.

Application of the seed can be accomplished by hand, or with the use of a handheld or push type spreader. Mixing your seed with an inert compound such as sand, rice hulls (available from Granite Seed), or sawdust will make it simpler to distribute the seeds evenly, and will allow the small seeds to feed through your spreader easier. After application, lightly rake the seed into the soil. The seed must touch the soil, but do not seed deeper than one-eighth inch (1/8") to an absolute maximum of one-half inch (1/2").

When to Plant

The optimum rainfall period, severity of the winter, and dormancy of the seed will determine the most favorable time to plant wildflowers in your area.

Perennials can be planted in the spring, or in late fall when the seeds will remain dormant. Dormant seedings offer natural stratification of seeds in the soil over winter months for better germination in the spring, but there is a risk that early spring weeds

may develop before germination. A late spring planting with pre-seeding weed control will give better results and require less long-term management.

Annual wildflowers may be planted in the spring or as a dormant seeding in late fall. These plants need to have time to grow and reseed themselves for growth the following year. Planting too late in spring or summer will not allow enough time for these plants to mature and develop viable seeds.

Biennials can be planted in spring, late summer, or late fall, as they need to grow, go dormant, and then will bloom the following year.

The most important thing is to use your own judgment on planting time. Your County Extension Service employees should be able to advise you for your area.

Seeding Rate

There is no set amount for a seeding rate. The size of the seeds, the species and the amount of money you want to spend are all factors to be considered. In general, for small areas, the amounts are 1 pound per 2,000 sq. ft.

Seed Quality

Granite Seed Co. has a quality control program to ensure that all seed is thoroughly cleaned, and tested for purity and germination, using the procedures sanctioned by the Association of Official Seed Analysts. Buyers are cautioned to never purchase seed which has not been tested for purity and germination. No company will guarantee success in planting, but if the above steps are followed, you'll soon have an abundance of wildflowers.

After Planting

Your new flowers will need a moist seedbed to allow proper germination. If rainfall is not sufficient, water enough to keep the site moist but not wet. Do not apply water in large amounts at first, as this may create a crust that the germinating seedlings will find difficult to break through. Avoid fertilizer applications as well. High water and fertilizer will benefit the competing weeds more than the flowers.

When the new growth on your site is large enough, hand removal of weeds is beneficial. Be aware that your new seedlings may resemble weeds themselves. A good way to identify weeds is to plant the flowers on your site in rows. Anything you see germinating outside the row should be removed. Care should be taken when removing weeds close to flowers to not damage the desired plant.

If your seed mix contains annuals, do not mow until the flowers have finished blooming. If your mix contains only perennials, mow at a height of six inches or higher throughout the first growing season. Care should be taken to mow before the weeds set seed to prevent future germination of these seeds. Keep in mind that perennials take at least two years to bloom and many take as long as three years to reach full potential.