Starting a Wildflower Garden from Seed

Help create pollinator pathways

Florida's native wildflowers and plants are essential to the pollinators we depend on. Landscaping with wildflowers can create pollinator pathways through urban areas, helping bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects to thrive.

What you can do

- Landscape with Florida native wildflowers and plants.
- Stop using pesticides, which harm bees and other beneficial insects.
- Stop using fertilizer, which harms waterways and lakes.
- Ask your county to preserve roadside wildflowers.
- Work with lawmakers to preserve and conserve natural resources and lands.

Resources

www.FlaWildflowers.org
www.PlantRealFlorida.org
www.FloridaWildflowers.com
www.FNPS.org
www.RegionalConservation.org/beta/nfyn

Follow these 12 steps to establish a small planting of native wildflowers:

1. Location, location, location
Choose a site that is sunny most of the day, has well-drained soil, and is free of weeds.

2. Determine suitable wildflower species
Information on www.FlaWildflowers.org/learn-to-grow can help you determine what species are appropriate for your garden. Find seed packets and mixes at www.FloridaWildflowers.com. Common wildflowers are generally adaptable to a range of gardening conditions and are generally listed as suitable for North, Central or South Florida where they will thrive naturally in nature.

3. Determine when to sow seeds
When to sow seeds depends on where you are in Florida. Generally, they can be sown between mid-September and mid-January, but we recommend referring to www.FlaWildflowers.org/seeding-dates for specifics. Planting can be extended to mid-April by using irrigation, but planting during hot months should be avoided because the soil's surface dries out too quickly.

4. For areas with turfgrass
While some gardeners prefer to chemically eradicate weeds with glyphosate,* the Foundation recommends soil solarization as the best means of obtaining a weed-free planting site. This process takes time and patience, and must be done from June to mid-August. First, remove existing turf and weeds with a shovel. Then till the soil 12 to 18 inches deep, breaking up soil clods (the finer the soil texture, the better). Remove sticks, roots and other debris brought up by tilling. Rake the surface of the area until smooth, then water until slightly moist but not soggy. Cover with clear plastic that is 3–6 mil thick. (1mil is equal to .001 or $^{1}/_{1000}$ inch.) To prevent wind from lifting the sheet, bury its edges in up to 12 inches of soil. Solarization takes about six weeks. Leave the plastic in place until the seed is sown.

5. For areas with bare soil
Scratch or firm up soil. Soil-to-seed contact is critical, so one day before seeding, or just prior to seeding, lightly scratch firmer soils with a rake. Sandy soils might have to be firmed by rolling to ensure that seeds do not sink too deeply.

** All chemicals should be used in accordance with directions on the manufacturer's label.*

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6. Sow seeds

This method distributes seeds evenly over the garden:

- Fill a large bucket about halfway with sand or vermiculite; slightly moisten the sand or vermiculite.
- Add half of the seeds and mix thoroughly.
- Starting at one end of the garden, spread the mixture evenly over the site.
- Repeat the above steps with the other half of the seeds but start spreading them from the opposite end of the plot.

7. Place seeds in contact with soil

Walk over the site to ensure good seed to soil contact. If the area is large, consider renting a sod roller. Seeds should remain on top of the soil or be covered 1/8 inch to 1/2 inch deep at most. Generally, the smaller the seed, the more shallowly it needs to be planted. Most seeds need light to germinate!

Water seeds gently after planting to help settle them in the soil, then wait until spring for further irrigation if rain is not sufficient for growth.

8. Be patient!

Though some species will germinate quickly, others may need to rest in the soil for 3 to 4 months. In that time they will naturally receive the water and fluctuating temperatures needed to stimulate their emergence at the right time in early spring.

9. Irrigate

Keep the planting site moist, but not wet. For loamy soils, that might mean watering 2 to 4 times per week with about 1/4 to 1/2 inches of water; sandy soils might need daily watering. Monitor the soil for moisture and adjust watering accordingly. After wildflowers germinate, irrigate with about 1/2-inch of water only if plants show signs of drought stress.

10. Keep out the weeds

To minimize weed interference, remove seedlings of grass or non-wildflowers by hand after wildflowers have emerged and been identified. To help identify your wildflowers, photos of common young plants showing leaf shape and arrangement can be found at FlaWildflowers.org/seedlingimagereport.

11. Do not fertilize

Many of Florida's native wildflower species are adapted to poor soils. Excess fertilization will promote vegetative growth over flowering, might make wildflowers more susceptible to insect and disease pests, and will promote weed growth. If plants appear nutritionally deficient in the growing season, a light layer of compost or several applications of a half-strength liquid fertilizer can be applied to correct the problem.

12. Wait until seeds have matured

Your wildflowers will reseed themselves if given the opportunity, so wait until seeds have matured on plants before deadheading or mowing. For many species, seeds need 2 to 4 weeks to mature after plants bloom. Seeds can be dried, stored in plastic bags at 40F, and replanted in the fall in your garden.