



Tips for Southwestern Wildflower Gardening



Choose your Season

Remember, wildflower seeds can be planted at anytime during the year. Some varieties actually do better if they are allowed to weather in place. Spring wildflowers typically germinate in late fall and early winter, bloom and then set seed in April and May. The seeds lie dormant through the long hot summer waiting for our winter rains to begin the cycle over again. Our summer wildflowers set seeds in the fall and their seeds lie dormant over the cool winter, waiting for the high humidity and monsoon rains of summer to germinate to begin their cycle.

However, these seeds lying dormant on the ground often become a food source for birds and other wild creatures. To keep animals from gathering the majority of our seeds, most wildflower gardeners wait until the last minute to plant. For spring bloomers this means anytime from late September through December or even early January. For summer bloomers we suggest planting as soon as the humidity begins to climb in late June.

Choose and Prepare your Site

Wildflowers appreciate sunshine. While there are some that don't mind shade and even a few that thrive in shade, most wildflowers prefer a sunny location. If you choose to water your wildflowers you will appreciate a location with easy access to a hose or irrigation line.

Wildflowers are WILD! They appreciate soils that drain well and can sprout in all but the most difficult soil conditions, so you won't need to do much in the way of soil improvements other than pulling unwanted weeds. Loosen your soil. You can use a hoe, shovel, gravel rake, or even a roto-tiller for large areas. You don't need to loosen it too deeply ... remember, they're WILD flowers.

Sow Your Seeds

The two easiest methods for the home-owner are the old fashioned hand-broadcast method for smaller jobs, or the use of a rotary or "cyclone" seeder for larger jobs. The former involves simply scattering the seed evenly over the site by hand, while the latter accomplishes the same result through the use of a hand-cranked spreader that can be rented, or purchased relatively cheaply at a garden center. Regardless of which sowing method you choose, we recommend mixing your seed with regular "sand box" sand at a ratio of about 5 parts (sand) to 1 part (seed). This allows for a more even distribution and also provides a convenient way to mark which portions of the site have been seeded and which have not.

After sowing, lightly compress your seeds into the soil — no more than a half inch — to protect them from birds, wind disbursement, etc. Remember, compress them, but don't bury them. For smaller areas you can accomplish this by simply walking over the portion that's just been seeded, or if it's a larger area, you might want to use a standard seed roller like those used when planting grass seed.

That's it, you're done! Kick back and let nature take its course and enjoy ... unless you choose to water your seeds. If you choose to water your wildflower garden, try to time your watering to mimic the normal seasonal weather patterns. (These seeds are wild and have their own internal sense about the right conditions so it's hard to fool them ... remember how spring blooming seeds know to lay dormant through the summer rainy season!)

Until they germinate, water your seeds daily. You want to moisten the soil but not so much that you create puddles. Once they germinate you can give them a good soak every 7—10 days until they are established.

After the Bloom

If you want your wildflower garden to reseed, don't pull up the plants after they begin to dry out and go to seed! Leave them in place until the last of the seeds have fallen. After that we suggest stomping the dry plants down in place to create a natural mulch.