

# HARRIS® SEEDS

## WILDFLOWER PLANTING GUIDE



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## **Mixture Formulation**

Wildflower mixtures are formulated on the basis of climatic conditions (rainfall, temperature range, humidity) and elevation. Most species in the mixtures adapt readily to different soil types provided climate and elevation are suitable. Annuals have been included to establish cover quickly and to give color the first year; some may produce new plants the following year (the biennials may also reseed). Perennial plants live for more than two years, and most flower from the second year onward. All species require full or partial sun. Mixes are blended to give the widest possible range of colors and periods of bloom. Very few wildflowers bloom continually throughout the season; therefore, spring, summer, and fall blooming species are included in each mixture. Colors include blue, purple, red, white, yellow and pink. Mix heights vary from 10 inches to 8 feet. In general, our mixtures are formulated to contain approximately equal numbers of seeds of each species. This varies somewhat because of costs, availability and/or climatic conditions. Mixtures may vary occasionally from the indicated listing, based on availability of individual species. Purity of most species is 95-99%, and actual germination ranges from 40-90% depending on species.

## **Selecting a Mix**

Regional Mixtures are designed to fit the broad cross-section of conditions that generally exist within any one geographic region. For example, species for both moist and dry conditions are included in each mixture, provided that these conditions exist in the particular region. Furthermore, species are included on the basis of their versatility or ability to adapt.

## **Site Selection**

Sowing wildflower seeds without care and planning usually produces unsatisfactory results. Here are some important factors to consider: (1) Does the site support plants now? If you have a site where nothing, including weeds, is growing, that site is unlikely to support wildflowers. (2) Will there be adequate moisture during germination and establishment? Can you supply supplemental water, if necessary? (3) What weed seeds are likely to be present in the soil? Will weeds spread to your site from adjacent areas? Assessment of these factors will enable you to make a realistic choice of a site where wildflowers will prosper and to decide what action will be necessary to ensure your success.

## **Planting Rates**

Each wildflower mixture has a recommended minimum and maximum planting rate. The minimum planting rates are generally based on 60-70 seeds per square foot (4 to 12 pounds per acre), which is usually sufficient to establish a good stand of wildflowers on prepared soil when adequate weed control can be maintained. Maximum planting rates are based on 120-140 seeds per square foot (8 to 24 pounds per acre), and are recommended when adequate soil preparation and weed control are not possible, or when maximum color is required.

## **When to Plant**

The best time to plant in your area depends on the climate and rainfall patterns. In cool climates, plant mixtures in spring, early summer or late fall. Fall plantings should be late enough so that seeds do not germinate until spring. Late fall plantings are advantageous when supplemental irrigation cannot be provided and adequate rainfall is anticipated in the spring. In mild climates, plant during the cooler months of the year, fall through spring, for best results. Fall plantings done prior to periods of rainfall will insure an early display of flowers the following spring.

## **Use of Grasses**

Wildflowers can be sown alone or with grasses. Hard Fescue or Sheep Fescue work well in most areas of the United States. However, in the southeastern states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina, use warm-season grasses. Warm-season grasses to consider include Gramas, Buffalo Grass and Bluestems. Aggressive grasses should be avoided because they will crowd out most wildflowers; these grasses include Kentucky Bluegrass, Smooth Brome, Crested Wheatgrass, Bermuda Grass, and Annual Rye. Mixes may be sown with these grasses if the planting rates of the grasses are low.

## **Site Preparation**

Proper site preparation is important for prompt germination of seed and healthy growth of seedlings. Best results will be obtained by planting on cleared ground. Remove existing vegetation to avoid competition from other plants. This may be done by pulling, tilling under, spraying with a general herbicide, or by a combination of these methods, depending upon the size of the area, type and density of vegetation and other factors. Loosen soil by scraping, tilling or scarifying. Tilling should be utilized only when soil is very compact and further weed control measures can be taken. Specific recommendations are given under the heading, Weed Control.

## **Seed Application**

Method of application depends on the size of the area and the terrain. On small areas, broadcast seeds evenly either by hand or by use of a drop or cyclone spreader. It is helpful to mix a carrier such as clean, dry sand with the seed; sand adds volume and aids in even distribution. Use a ratio of 1 or 2 parts sand to 1 part seed. Rake in lightly, covering seeds to a maximum depth of 2-3 times their thickness. Or drag the area lightly with a piece of chain link fence to mix the seed into the surface of the soil.

For seeding large areas, i.e., over one acre, specially designed drills are most effective. Drill to a maximum of 1/4 inch and firm soil with a cultipacker; this maximizes seed/soil contact. Hydroseeders are also effective, especially for steep slopes, rocky terrain and other areas where conditions make it impractical for driving equipment. Hydroseeding is the application of a slurry of seed and water to soil. The slurry may also contain mulch (hydromulching), a tackifier and fertilizer. Mulches are made of wood fiber, paper or excelsior, and their purpose is to hold seeds in place, help retain moisture and provide protection from erosion; mulches are usually dyed green as a visual aid in even distribution. Rates of application for most mulches are between 1500 and 23 00 pounds per acre. In general, hydroseeding and hydromulching is most successful in moist climates or in irrigated areas. Most authorities agree that germination is better when seed is applied first with 5-10% of the mulching fiber—the balance of the mulch being applied separately as a second step. This approach ensures optimal seed/soil contact; otherwise, many seeds are wasted because they become suspended in the fiber. It is important that proper procedures are followed to minimize the amount of time that seed is circulated through pumps or paddles prior to application.

## **Moisture and Fertilization**

All seeds, including wildflowers, need ample moisture to germinate and to develop into healthy seedlings. Best results will be obtained by soaking the planted areas thoroughly and maintaining consistent moisture for 4-6 weeks — then gradually reducing waterings. In non-irrigated situations, plant in the spring or before periods of anticipated rainfall. After seedlings are established, watering may be reduced depending on the climate and rainfall. In arid climates or during drought conditions, up to 1/2 inch of supplemental water per week may be required to maintain an optimal display. If weeds are present, remember that they benefit from moisture as much as the wildflowers and may dominate overwatered areas.

Many wildflowers benefit from some fertilization if the soil does not have adequate nutrients. Some wildflowers do fine in poor soils, while others require a more fertile environment. A soil test should be performed when soil quality is unknown. If the soil needs improvement, use a low nitrogen fertilizer with a 5-10-10 ratio or add organic matter such as weed-free straw or grass clippings, well-rotted compost, peat moss, or leaf mold. In addition to adding nutrients, organic materials enhance soil structure and encourage beneficial microorganisms. Avoid over-fertilizing which may promote weed growth and lush foliage rather than flowers.

### **Weed Control**

Weed control is the biggest problem facing plant establishment and one which has no easy solution. Weed seeds are present in many situations and lie dormant, but viable, for long periods. A weedy area converted to wildflowers will have a large reservoir of weed seeds in the soil, ready to germinate when conditions are favorable. In most cases, it is advisable to consider weed control in two phases—as part of site preparation prior to planting, and as an important component of the post-germination maintenance program. Before planting, remove existing weeds by pulling, tilling under, applying a glyphosate herbicide such as Roundup®, or by a combination of these methods. In very weedy areas, the following method is suggested: (1) Till soil or spray vegetation with Roundup®. When using an herbicide, allow vegetation to die, then rake out the dead debris. If perennial weeds such as bindweed are present, using an herbicide is more effective than tilling. (2) Irrigate to encourage germination of weed seeds near the surface; most seeds will germinate within two weeks if consistent moisture is available. Do not till the soil again because this will bring even more weed seeds up to the surface. (3) Spray any new growth with Roundup®. (4) After raking out dead vegetation, allow soil to recover for 3-4 weeks before planting seed. Once the seeds have germinated, further weed control is usually necessary. If practical, pull all weeds as soon as they can be identified. Other successful techniques are spot-spraying with a general herbicide or selectively cutting weeds with a string trimmer. Be sure to remove weeds before they reseed.

### **What to Expect**

During their initial establishment period, wildflowers may require as much maintenance as traditional plantings. A smooth, weed-free planting bed is important for good seed soil contact and prompt germination. Cover seeds lightly to protect them from drying out during germination, and to prevent them from being eaten by birds. Consistent moisture is important for 4 - 6 weeks after planting. Annuals germinate quickly when conditions are favorable, providing a quick groundcover and competition against weeds. Natural reseeding of annuals ranges from significant to minimal, depending on the species, climate, soil texture and other factors. Most perennial and biennial species begin to bloom the second season, but not as profusely as annuals. Therefore, wildflower plantings look noticeably different after the first year. Sometimes it is desirable or even necessary to sow seed in second and subsequent years. Reseeding may be necessary if establishment of wildflowers is spotty or poor. Where natural reseeding of annuals is minimal, sowing annuals each spring can produce a magnificent annual and perennial display throughout the growing season. If desired, wildflowers may be mowed in the fall following seed set. Mow to a height of 4-6 inches, and leave the residue on the ground because it is a reservoir of viable seeds.