

Gardening With Wildflowers

by Dr. Walter Kingsley Taylor

Throughout the United States there is an increased interest in using wildflowers for landscape plantings. Florida is no exception. With the rapid development of our native habitats we are losing annually thousands of acres where wildflowers grow. Roadsides of many county roads in Florida have become wastelands that grow weedy plants including ragweed, cogongrass, Johnsongrass, dog fennel, Mexican tea, and many others. These noxious plants compete with our more desirable wildflowers and eventually replace them.



Establishing wildflowers in ones yard or creating a wildflower meadow are not easy tasks. Wildflowers need help in becoming established; however, once they are established, the garden or site containing these plants will need minimal care. When planting wildflowers make a concerted effort to emulate nature. The more one knows about the biology of the plants (e.g., where they grow in nature, when they produce seeds, when the seeds germinate, etc.) the better chance the results will be positive.

Not all attractive wildflowers one might desire can be grown in Florida due to their climate, soil type, and other habitational

requirements. Plants that grow in the Panhandle probably will not do well in South Florida; the reverse is also true. Experiment with different species, but experiment with the common, more hearty-types. Read books that are available on Florida wildflowers, paying attention to species that occur in your locale.

Seed Source

There is no single place where one can purchase seeds of wildflowers grown from Florida plants. Check with your local native plant nursery and county agent for possible locations for buying seeds.

Seeds can be collected from wild plants, but one must be certain that the seeds are fully mature. Never attempt to dig up and transplant wildflowers from the wild. For many species it is illegal and secondly many wildflowers do not transplant well. Purchasing wildflower mixtures usually is not worth the effort and money. One may have good results the first year from such a mixture, but most often the second and subsequent years' production will be poor. Packets of selected individual species (e.g., black-eyed susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*; blanket flower, *Gaillardia pulchella*) that grow naturally in Florida are ones best investments. One should have a mix of perennials and annuals in the garden.

When to Plant?

The time to plant seeds in Florida soils is the fall or early winter because the cooler months are usually the most stress-free times. Plants that need to produce rosettes or basal leaves before blooming in the spring have the time to do so when seeds are planted in the fall.

Establishing Wildflowers

Tossing seeds here and there on the ground will not work. One is wasting ones time and money. Just as if one were planting a vegetable garden, proper soil preparation is crucial. It may be a good idea to obtain the pH (hydrogen ion content) of the soil from the county agent's office. Checking the pH will allow one to determine if the soil is acid or alkaline. Many attractive wildflowers will not grow or not do well on former orange grove sites because of the alkaline soils produced when much lime was added for the citrus plants. Try to change the pH level of the soil. To the contrary, native azaleas, lyonias, blueberries, and other members of the heath family (*Ericaceae*) require acid soils for hearty productions. Seeds from lupines, morning-glories, and other species that have hard seed coats should be soaked before planting.

Steps to Follow:

A step by step presentation for establishing wildflowers follows.

1. Carefully choose the site. Think about shade vs. sun, drainage, slope, etc. Wildflowers that grow in dry, sandy soils most likely will not do well in wet soil.
2. Once the site is chosen, proper preparation of the ground is very important. Eliminate grasses and other vegetation that will compete with the wildflowers. Pull out unwanted vegetation or herbicide the area if there is much vegetation present. Use biodegradable herbicides that contain glyphosate. Products on the market that are safe are Roundup and Kleenup. Always read and follow the directions given on the container.
3. After 2 weeks or so, rake away the dead vegetation. If one still has vegetation remaining, repeat the process. Depending upon the richness of your soil, one might want to apply a light application of fertilizer, such as 6-6-6 to the soil before planting. Do not overfertilize. Very sandy soils may need some organic matter for soil enrichment; however, do not over do it.
4. Rake or till the soil lightly. Try not to exceed a depth of more than 1 inch so as not to uncover a large amount of unwanted weed seeds already in the soils.
5. Mix the seeds with sand or loose soil in a proportion of four parts sand to one part seeds. This will help obtain an even spread of the seeds. Hand-broadcast the seeds on a non-windy day.
6. Seed to soil contact is very important. Press the seeds in the ground by walking lightly on the bed or by very lightly raking the soil. Do not cover the seeds too deep.
7. After the seeds are planted they must be kept moist. Water with a fine spray every other day; do not let the ground completely dry out. Once the plants are established reduce the frequency of watering, but the plants should not wilt. Less watering makes the plants form deep roots.
8. Most often one will have to periodically weed the bed to keep out unwanted grasses and other plants.
9. At the end of the season (mid-late summer) when the plants have died and gone to seed, mow the bed to about three inches.
10. Best of luck. Keep experimenting. Try new species, too. Do not give up even if the first try gives poor results.

Commercial Sources for Wildflower Seeds

Write for a catalog or listing of wildflower seeds for sale.

1. The Vermont Wildflower Farm, P.O. Box 1400, Louisiana, MO 63353.
2. Wildseed Farms Ltd., P.O. Box 3000, Fredericksburg, TX 78624-3000.
3. Holland Wildflower Farm, P.O. Box 328, Elkins, ARK 72727.

Selected Florida Wildflowers for Gardening

<u>Name & family</u>	<u>area in Florida</u>	<u>soil moisture</u>	<u>flowering season</u>
<u>Herbaceous types:</u>			
<u>Asteraceae (aster or daisy family)</u>			
*Black-eyed Susan, <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	throughout	dry-moist soils	all year
*Blanket flower, <i>Gaillardia pulchella</i>	throughout	open sandy areas	all year
*Blazing star, <i>Liatris spicata</i>	throughout	moist soils	spring - fall
*Tickseed, <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>	central & north	dry - moist, sandy soils	spring - summer
*Tickseed, <i>Coreopsis tinctoria</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring - summer
*Yarrow, <i>Achillea millefolium</i>	central & north	dry-moist soils	spring - fall
Dye flower, <i>Coreopsis basalis</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring - summer
Goldenrod, <i>Solidago odora</i>	throughout	dry-moist soils	spring - fall
Tickseed, <i>Coreopsis leavenworthii</i>	central & north	moist soils	all year
<u>Campanulaceae (bluebell family)</u>			
*Cardinal flower, <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	central & north	wet sites	summer - fall
<u>Commelinaceae (day flower family)</u>			
*Spiderwort, <i>Tradescantia ohiensis</i>	throughout	moist soils	all year

Fabaceae (bean or pea family)

*Crimson clover, <i>Trifolium incarnatum</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring
*Sundial lupine, <i>Lupinus perennis</i>	north	moist, sandy soils	spring
White wild indigo, <i>Baptisia .alba</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring

Iridaceae (iris family)

Blue-eyed grass, <i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i>	throughout	moist wet soils	spring - summer
Prairie iris, <i>Iris hexagona</i>	throughout	moist wet soils	spring

Onagraceae (primrose family)

*Showy primrose, <i>Oenothera speciosa</i>	central & north	moist disturbed soils	spring - fall
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Poaceae (grass family)

Muhly grass, <i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i>	throughout	sandy soils	fall
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Polemoniaceae (phlox family)

*Annual garden phlox, <i>Phlox drummondii</i>	throughout	dry-moist sandy soils	winter - summer
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Rubiaceae (madder family)

Partridge berry, <i>Mitchella repens</i>	throughout	moist soil	all year
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Scrophulariaceae (snapdragon family)

Mullein, <i>Verbascum virgatum</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring - summer
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Verbenaceae (vervain or verbena family)

Moss verbena, <i>Glandularia pulchella</i>	throughout	dry-moist soils	spring - fall
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Shrub types:

Asteraceae (aster or daisy family)

Garberia, <i>Garberia heterophylla</i>	central	sandy soils	spring - winter
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Clusiaceae (formerly Hypericaceae; St. John's wort family)

St. Andrew's cross, <i>Hypericum hypericoides</i>	throughout	dry-moist soils	all year
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Ericaceae (heath family)

Dog hobble, <i>Leucothoe axillaris</i>	central & north	moist, acid soils	winter - spring
Fetterbush, <i>Leucothoe racemosa</i>	central & north	moist, acid soils	spring
Flame azalea, <i>Rhododendron austrinum</i>	central & north	moist, acid soils	spring
Shiny blueberry, <i>Vaccinium myrsinites</i>	throughout	moist, acid soils	winter - spring
Shiny lyonia, <i>Lyonia lucida</i>	throughout	dry to moist acid soils	winter - spring
Wild azalea, <i>Rhododendron canescens</i>	central & north	moist, acid soils	spring

Fabaceae (bean or pea family)

Coralbean, <i>Erythrina herbacea</i>	throughout	dry to moist soils	winter - spring
Pineland wild indigo, <i>Baptisia lanceolata</i>	central & north	moist, sandy soils	spring

Laminaceae (mint family)

Blue curls, <i>Trichostema dichotomum</i>	throughout	moist soils	summer - fall
Horsemint, <i>Monarda punctata</i>	central & north	moist soils	spring - fall
Tropical sage, <i>Salvia coccinea</i>	throughout	moist sandy soils	all year

Malvaceae (mallow family)

Scarlet hibiscus, <i>Hibiscus coccineus</i>	throughout	moist - wet soils	spring - fall
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Saxifragaceae (saxifrage family)

Virginia willow, <i>Itea virginica</i>	throughout	moist - wet soils	winter - summer
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Verbenaceae (vervain or verbena family)

Beautyberry bush, <i>Callicarpa americana</i>	throughout	dry - moist soils	spring - fall
Blue porterweed, <i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i>	central & south	moist soils	all year
Firebush, <i>Hamelia patens</i>	central & south	moist soils	all year

* Seeds can usually be found in commercial catalogs.