

Native Plant Sowing Guide



Introduction



Oklahoma's wildflowers aren't just for roadsides. With this Color Oklahoma Native Plant Sowing Guide, you can bring their beauty to formal garden beds, lawn borders, native prairies, or open woodlands. Plant annuals, perennials, or both, choosing blooms for spring, fall, or all season long. Start from seed, potted plants, or a mix, and enjoy experimenting until you find the perfect combination for your space.

The next sections offer simple tips, along with important do's and don'ts, for growing native wildflowers that thrive.



Everything You Need to Sow Your Wild Seeds

RECOMMENDED NATIVE SPECIES

The most popular and best performing species in Oklahoma are black-eyed Susan, Indian blanket (our state wildflower), Indian paintbrush, big-flower coreopsis, Mexican hat, prairie coneflower, purple coneflower, clasping coneflower, lazy daisy, lemon beebalm, showy evening primrose, Missouri ironweed, and plains tickseed.

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SEED & PLANT SOURCES

Color Oklahoma buys only seeds of species native to the state and harvested in this region. Our primary seed sources are Wildseed Farms, Native American Seed and Johnston Seed Company. Sowing seeds harvested in this region helps ensure success and hardiness.

Biology of Wildflowers



Most prairie wildflowers love at least 6 hours of sunlight a day, want water only occasionally, and hate foot traffic.



Some seeds germinate in 10–20 days. Other species over-winter and germinate in the early spring. Sow seeds in the fall for the best results. Be aware that wildflower seed germination and plant establishment is quite dependent upon the weather.



Flowers and fruits do not necessarily need to be collected; the seeds will be dispersed naturally from dying or dead plants.



Annuals return if fruits and seeds are allowed to mature before mowing. Maturation takes two or more weeks. When dense brown foliage offsets the floral colors, the plants can be mowed or the flowers/fruits trimmed, and the seeds collected.



Perennials return year after year.

Site Preparation of a Formal Garden Bed

STEP BY STEP GUIDE:

- **Create a raised bed** using natural rocks or pavers.
- **Mow existing vegetation** as short as possible and remove clippings.
- **Remove competing plants** by using a non-residual herbicide, e.g., bermudagrass, that would compete with wildflowers.
- **Fill enclosed area** with river sand from a local sand & gravel company; tamp down and mound in bed's center.
- **Mulch the area** using pea gravel as mulch, 3/8 –1/2 inch deep.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Water Schedule:** Water lightly only during the germination and seedling stages.
- **Do Not Fertilize:** Added nutrients are unnecessary.
- **Monitor for Weeds:** As weedy species such as spurge, horseweed, cranesbill, fleabane, or yellow sorrel appear, they should be pulled by hand.

Site Preparation of a Small Area of Lawn

STEP BY STEP GUIDE:

- **Mow existing vegetation** as short as possible and remove clippings. A thick thatch/debris layer can trap wildflower seed above the soil and result in poor germination.
- **Remove competing plants** by using a non-residual herbicide, e.g., bermudagrass, that would compete with wildflowers. This process may need to start several weeks prior to planned wildflower seeding.
- **Rake the area** using a 3-pronged rake or cultivator; rake area no more than 1/4" deep to loosen soil and create furrows.
- **Mix seeds thoroughly** and hand broadcast. Lightly rake again.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Water Schedule:** Water lightly only during the germination and seedling stages.
- **Do Not Fertilize:** Added nutrients are unnecessary.
- **Know Where You Sow:** Do not sow wildflower seeds in annual ryegrass, fescue, or other winter-growing grasses. These grasses won't give wildflower seeds a chance to germinate and establish seedlings.
- **Hand Till Only:** Do not use a roto-tiller, as it digs too deep and brings dormant weed seeds to the surface.
- **Follow Instructions:** Read and follow all herbicide label directions. In general, don't use pre-emergent herbicides, and don't use post-emergent herbicides that leave a residual that interferes with wildflower seed germination.

Site Preparation of a Small Area of Bark Mulch

STEP BY STEP GUIDE:

- **Remove bark mulch** from the area to be planted.
- **Remove competing plants** by using a non-residual herbicide, e.g., bermudagrass, that would compete with wildflowers. This process may need to start several weeks prior to planned wildflower seeding.
- **Rake the area** using a 3-pronged rake or cultivator; rake area no more than 1/4" deep to loosen soil and create furrows.
- **Mix seeds thoroughly** and hand broadcast. Lightly rake again.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Water Schedule:** Water lightly only during the germination and seedling stages.
- **Do Not Fertilize:** Added nutrients are unnecessary.
- **Know Where You Sow:** Do not sow wildflower seeds in annual ryegrass, fescue, or other winter-growing grasses. These grasses won't give wildflower seeds a chance to germinate and establish seedlings.
- **Hand Till Only:** Do not use a roto-tiller, as it digs too deep and brings dormant weed seeds to the surface.
- **Follow Instructions:** Read and follow all herbicide label directions. In general, don't use pre-emergent herbicides, and don't use post-emergent herbicides that leave a residual that interferes with wildflower seed germination.

Site Preparation of a Large Native Grass Prairie

STEP BY STEP GUIDE:

- **Mow grass** as short as possible (or use an herbicide) to reduce aggressive or invasive vegetation.
- **Sow Your Wild Seeds.** If available, use a dedicated wildflower seeding unit, as it will do an excellent job of slit-seeding. An alternative is to drag a railroad tie spiked with long nails through the area to furrow and roughen the soil.
- **Broadcast the seeds** by hand, or use a hand-held broadcast seeder or a large broadcast seeder.
- **Make contact.** Drag a piece of chain-link fence weighted with concrete blocks over the area to bring the seeds into contact with soil.
- **DIY Seeding:** If a dedicated wildflower seeding unit is not available, an alternative is to drag a railroad tie spiked with long nails through the area to furrow and roughen the soil.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Broadcast the Seeds** using a hand broadcast, or use a hand-held broadcast seeder or large broadcast seeder to sow seeds over the area. Drag a piece of chain-link fence weighted with concrete blocks over the area to bring the seeds into contact with soil.
- **Know When to Sow 'Em:** Start the seed sowing process in mid- to late fall.

Site Preparation of an Open Woodland

STEP BY STEP GUIDE:

- **Mow existing vegetation** as short as possible and remove clippings. A thick thatch/debris layer can trap wildflower seed above the soil and result in poor germination.
- **Remove competing plants** by using a non-residual herbicide, e.g., bermudagrass, that would compete with wildflowers. This process may need to start several weeks prior to planned wildflower seeding.
- **Rake the area** using a 3-pronged rake or cultivator; rake area no more than 1/4" deep to loosen soil and create furrows.
- **Mix seeds thoroughly** and hand broadcast. Lightly rake again.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- **Water Schedule:** Water lightly only during the germination and seedling stages.
- **Do Not Fertilize:** Added nutrients are unnecessary.
- **Know What You Sow:** Select species that are recommended to thrive in partial shade, e.g., yellow crown beard, frostweed, fragrant everlasting, heal-all, late boneset, and broadleaf uniola.
- **Hand Till Only:** Do not use a roto-tiller, as it digs too deep and brings dormant weed seeds to the surface.

Final Thoughts

1.

BE PERSISTENT

If at first you don't succeed at establishing a pleasing wildflower plot, try, try again!

2.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Wildflower seed germination and seedling establishment is dependent upon the weather, temperature and precipitation. Remember that seed of cultivated plants is selected for predictable germination, whereas wildflower seed exhibits variability to ensure survival.

3.

EXPERIMENT

Don't hesitate to try different species each growing season. As they say, variety is the spice of life!



To support our mission of preservation, **Color Oklahoma** buys native wildflower seeds that are sown along our highways, turnpikes and public spaces. Primary funding for Color Oklahoma comes from the sale of wildflower license plates. The colorful wildflower plate replaces your current Oklahoma license plate.