

How to Grow Wildflowers



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When to Plant

Spring, summer and fall are all wildflower planting times, depending on your region, your weather, and the way you want to approach establishing your meadow. No matter when or where you plant, site preparation is roughly the same. But the first consideration is not the season; it's your climate.

For mild-winter areas: If you're planting in a warm place such as California, Florida or southern Texas, with minimal — or no — winter frost, you can plant almost anytime, except during your hottest season. Best time is just before your rainiest season begins, and when you know the weather will not be too hot for young seedlings. In Florida, fall is best. In California, most wildflowers are planted during the winter to take advantage of California's greening in early spring.

For all areas with killing frost: If you have definite killing frost in winter, things are different. In these areas (most of the country) spring and fall are both fine for planting, and each has its advantages.



Spring Planting

Most wildflower meadows are installed in spring, simply because that is when most gardening happens. To plant in spring, timing is important. The earliest possible time is about one week before you'd put out tomato seedlings in your area. In other words, as the seed packets have always said, "when danger of frost is past." But there are other important considerations.

If you're like most meadow gardeners, once you clear your ground by tilling or any other method, you'll want to sow your seed immediately thereafter — if possible on



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the same day, surely the one after. You can't till the area one weekend, and seed the next. Here's the reason. The minute you open the ground, you turn up weed seeds that are in all soil. If you wait before putting in your flower seed, those weed seeds have an important "jump" on the flowers, and they may become quickly dominant over the flower seed as your meadow area grows. By putting the flower seed in quickly, you at least give your flowers a "level playing field" with the grasses and weeds that are sure to grow up with them.

Summer Planting

It's perfectly acceptable to plant wildflower seed in most all areas during summer, except those places that experience temperatures that stay in the eighties or higher. Many flower seeds simply will not germinate at high temperatures. However, in many places, variable weather and cooler nights make early summer fine for planting. The later it is, the more watering you'll probably have to do.

Fall Planting

Fall and spring planting can be equally successful with wildflowers, and each season has its devoted fans for several reasons.

Many people like to say "Nature plants wildflowers in the fall." and that is basically true. All season long, flowers in the wild are blooming, then "going to seed", which means dropping their seeds to propagate their individual species. For example, a very successful species such as Black-eyed Susan blooms in mid-summer and then drops a large number of seeds from each dying flower in late summer. If weather cooperates, these seeds may sprout before winter. If it is dry and hostile for the seeds, they will simply lay there through the winter and sprout in spring.



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1. Prepare the land where you will sow your wildflower seeds.
 - You can use any soil to plant wildflowers unless the soil is sterile. If grass and weeds are growing there now, wildflowers will also flourish.
 - Clear the ground as much as possible. Smother the other plants with wet newspaper, which can be plowed right into the soil. Dig out small areas by hand or use a rototiller for large areas. Till only deep enough to remove old roots. Deep tilling is not advised.
2. Discover which wildflowers are best for your area and know their classification.
 - Most wildflowers are annuals. They bloom quickly and heavily, drop their seeds, and die when the weather either gets too cold or dry to live, based on your locale. Many are "self-sowing" and more plants will grow the next year because of the seeds that were dropped as the plants die. Poppies, cornflowers and cosmos are examples of wildflower annuals.
 - Perennials establish a root system and come back each year. Perennials can last decades and spread more each year. Many are slower to sprout and bloom than are annuals. Purple coneflowers, daisies and coreopsis are examples of perennial wildflowers.
 - Biennials will sprout one season but not bloom until the next year. They are then killed by frost but since they self-seed, more plants will sprout in the spring. Black-eyed Susans and sweet Williams are examples of biennials.
3. Choose a sunny location that has good drainage. Natural features such as boulders or a nearby woodland can enhance the look of your wildflower meadow or garden.



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4. Plant your wildflower garden or meadow near a water source to help keep your wild garden from dying during brief dry spells or even longer droughts.
5. Fertilize sparingly. Wildflowers grow naturally without much pampering. If you do fertilize, use one with low nitrogen.
6. Check with gardening experts, with your county extension office's agricultural service, or consult the recommended coverage guidelines on your box or package of seeds to determine how much seed you will need for the area you have to cover.
7. Sow your wildflower seed using the split-and-sand method.
 - Divide your seed in half.
 - Mix one half of the seed with about 10 parts of light sand or vermiculite to 1 part seed.
 - Choose a windless day to sow your wildflower seed. Otherwise, it could be difficult to control where your wildflower seeds settle.
 - Sow the seed over your prepared site. The light color of the sand or vermiculite will show you where the seed has fallen. Repeat the process with the second half filling in missed spots.
 - Press the seed into the soil by walking over it, placing an old piece of plywood down and jumping on it, or by using a lawn roller. The seed must be pressed into the soil so that it won't easily blow away. Do not cover your seed with more soil as that may prevent wildflower seed from easily sprouting.
8. Ensure your newly-planted wildflower garden or meadow stays moist for the first 4 to 6 weeks or until the plants are well-established. Wetting the seed also keeps it from blowing away. Wildflowers grow naturally without a lot of care, but you need to water them periodically when conditions are especially dry.