

United States Department of Agriculture



Plant Materials Program

# Fact Sheet

## Guidelines for Fall Wildflower Planting



*Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center - Coffeerville, MS*

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### Overview

Municipalities, schools, property owners, and gardeners are discovering the benefits of native wildflower plantings. Once established, wildflowers beautify the landscape while providing habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.



The habitat value of these plantings can be enhanced when wildflowers are coupled with warm-season native grasses or native shrubs.



Also, considerable amounts of time, money, and labor can be reduced by converting high-maintenance turf areas to wildflower plantings.

## Recommended Species

Wildflower species that grow naturally in your area are generally a good indicator of what will perform best. Keep in mind that some species require specific growing conditions (moist or dry soil, sun or shade, etc.). Match your growing conditions to the plants' cultural requirements. Some of the more common wildflower species available to landowners include plains coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), claspine coneflower (*Dracopis amplexicaulis*), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), and a number of perennial sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*). In Mississippi, seeds of some wildflower species can be purchased through local Soil & Water Conservation District offices or local USDA service centers.



## When to Plant

A number of our native spring-blooming wildflowers generally perform better when seed are sowed in the fall. These plants are adapted to germinate and establish a crown and root system as the weather begins to cool. They may overwinter as a small rosette of leaves, benefitting from the abundant moisture during the winter.

By the spring, the plants should be poised for growth and blooming.



In the southeastern U.S., the window for sowing wildflower seed is generally mid-September through mid-October.

## Soil Preparation

Minimal soil preparation is usually the best approach when establishing wildflowers. Existing vegetation should be removed by hand-pulling or herbicide application. A light cultivation may be necessary to insure good seed-to-soil contact. Avoid deep tillage as this could bring multitudes of weed seeds to the surface.

## Sowing Seeds

Wildflower seeds can be broadcast by hand or with a seeder. Sand or some type of carrier can be mixed with seed to improve coverage and spreadability. Seeds should be raked in or tamped for good soil contact. If practical, seeds may be watered in after sowing. Most wildflower seeds will germinate in 15 – 20 days; other species may germinate in early spring.

## Long-term Maintenance

Wildflower plantings require substantially less maintenance than most other landscapes.



Plantings can be mowed in late fall or early winter after old flower heads have dried out. Generally, wildflower stands will reseed prolifically for the first 3-5 years. However, stands will gradually decline without soil disturbance. Every 2-3 years the site should be lightly disked to control perennial weeds and enhance reseeding. Selective grass herbicides can also be used to keep weedy grasses in check.

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### Natural Resources Conservation Service



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For further information on specific wildflowers and their planting information, visit the Web:

Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Service  
<http://www.mswcc.state.ms.us/Wildflowers/wildflowers.html>

Jamie L Whitten Plant Materials Center  
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/mspmc/>

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