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Digging Deep How to Cultivate a Wildflower Meadow

By Cynthia Brian



A field of wildflowers in Moraga pear orchard. Photos Cynthia Brian

What I found out is that wildflowers aren't fussy. They grow in all kinds of soil, don't need water once they are established, and add stunning textures and vibrancy to your landscape.

1. Find a place where the flowers will get at least six hours of daily sunshine. Wildflowers need lots of sunshine.
2. Before spreading the seed, clear the dirt. Purge all weeds, grasses, or any other growth from the area. Turn the soil with a hoe or a tiller.
3. Rake the soil.
4. Add sand to the seeds at the rate of 10-parts sand to one-part seed. This will help you to see it when you spread it. Use a seed spreader if you are seeding a big area, or feel free to sprinkle by hand.
5. Don't cover the seed with soil. It does need to be compressed for better germination either by walking on it or rolling it. I use a five-gallon bucket to roll over the seeded soil in any smaller locations.
6. Water the seeds regularly until the plants reach six inches. After that, wildflowers flourish without the addition of extra water, especially great addition to any garden when there is a drought.
7. Prepare for a cavalcade of colors. Annuals bloom quickly, usually within five weeks while perennials may not blossom until the second year.

While many of these flowers are sold in nurseries as "annuals," they are wildflowers that will look handsome in your new garden. Annuals live, bloom and die in one year. Many spread their own seeds after they are done flowering.

Here are some types of Annuals:

"May all your weeds be wildflowers."

When I was a child weeds and wildflowers were synonymous. I would meander through the hills and creeks with my handy Golden Nature Guide called "Flowers: A Guide to Familiar American Wildflowers," along with notebook, paper and a Brownie camera to capture the images and properties of as many specimens that I could find.

Trillium, morning glory, lupin, California poppy, clover, stargazer, brodia, columbine, buttercups and mustard all captivated me. I would pick the flowers to quickly bring home to iron between wax paper and catalogue into my wildflower scrapbook. In a field of specimens, I'd dig a plant up with the attached roots to transplant into my personal flower plot.

African Daisy

California Poppy

Cleome

Cornflower

Coreopsis

Cosmos

Delphinium

Forget-Me-Not

Four O'Clock

Gaillardia

Lupin

Morning glory

Shirley Poppy

Sunflower

Tithinoa

Zinnia

"Perennials" are interesting as most of them are blue, yellow, orange or pink. Perennials come back year after year and continue spreading their seeds and beauty. They do need to be pruned back at the end of the season.

Here are some types of Perennials:

Agastache

Aster

Bee Balm

Blanket Flower

Blazing Star

Blue Eyed Grass

Blue Flag Iris

Blue Flax

Butterfly Weed

Cardinal Flower

Columbine

Echinacea

Goldenrod

Gloriosa Daisy

Indian Paint Brush

Joy Pye Weed

Lobelia

Mexican Hat

Milkweed

Oriental Poppy

Turtlehead

Purple clover

Soapwort

Shooting Star

Wild Petunia

"Biennials" are plants that live for only two years. During their first year they have foliage but no flowers. In the second year they bloom, set seeds then die. Their complete life-cycle is two years.

Here are some types of Biennials:

Black-eyed Susan

Canterbury Bells

Dame's Rocket

Evening Primrose

Hollyhock

Queen Anne's Lace

Sweet William

Where to Find Seeds:

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds: www.RareSeeds.com

Renee's Garden: www.ReneesGarden.com

Sow True Seed: www.SowTrueSeed.com

American Meadows: www.AmericanMeadows.com

Territorial Seed Company: www.TerritorialSeed.com

Select Seeds: www.SelectSeeds.com

John Scheepers Garden Seeds: www.KitchenGardenSeeds.com

Lady Bird Johnson may have said it best with her heartfelt words about wildflowers: "Almost every person from childhood on, has been touched by the untamed beauty of wildflowers. Buttercup gold under a childish chin, the single drop of exquisite sweetness in the blossom of wild honeysuckle, the love-me, love-me-not philosophy of daisy petals."

Wildflowers have certainly been an essential element in my life. I still have that "Golden Nature Guide" (it cost me a hard earned \$1 selling chicken eggs) and that Brownie camera (now on display on my collectibles shelf) but most of all I still have the passion for wildflowers. My wildflower garden has been sown and I look forward to sharing photos with you once the blooming begins.

Spring forward and enjoy the outdoors. Plant a wildflower meadow.

MID-MARCH REMINDERS from Cynthia Brian

CONGRATULATIONS are in order to the Lamorinda Wine Grower's Association for their diligent efforts in getting the 29,369 acres of Lamorinda recognized as an American Viticultural Area (AVA). To buy local wine or learn more, visit www.LamorindaWineGrowers.com

CUT the spent blossoms off of daffodils and narcissus but leave the leaves to add nutrients for next year's blooms.

HARVEST asparagus spears when they are six to eight inches long.

DYE eggs for Easter with colors from your garden. Red and yellow onions, grapes, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, beets and more will give a unique look to your egg hunt.

PLANT your bare root roses, vines, and trees. Prepare the soil with compost, dig the hole according to directions, fill with top soil, water and wait for the magic.

UPCOMING GARDEN EVENTS:

VISIT the San Francisco Flower and Garden show from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. March 16-19 at the San Mateo Event Center, 1346 Saratoga Drive, San Mateo, to find answers to your gardening dilemmas. \$22. www.sfgardenshow.com.

ATTEND the Water Conservation Showcase on March 22 between 9 a.m.-6 p.m. at the P.G.&E. Energy Center, 851 Howard Street, San Francisco. It's sponsored by the United States Green Building Council dedicated to educating and inspiring solutions for saving water, energy, and our Earth. Jackson Madnick, Founder of Pearl's Premium grass seed, will be presenting at 4 p.m. This is a great opportunity to meet the lawn pioneer in person to understand how revolutionary his seeds are and how you can have a lawn in a drought.

SWAP plants and tools from 12-4 p.m. on March 26 at 4500 Lincoln Avenue in Oakland. Trade your goods for other garden elements. Free. www.theplantexchange.com

MARK your calendars for wine and books event benefiting Be the Star You Are! charity from noon until 7 p.m. on Saturday, April 9 at Dawn's Dream Winery Tasting room, NW Corner of Seventh and San Carlos, Carmel-by-the-Sea. www.bethestaryouare.org/#/events/kgh2e.

SAVE the Earth from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. April 17 at the Wildlife Earth Day Festival at Wagner Ranch in Orinda.

Happy Gardening and Happy Growing.



California poppies and wild iris makes a stellar combination during wildflower season.



Who can resist the deep rose blossoms of a crab apple tree?



Cala lilies usher in spring.



The once-a-month mow grass of Pearl's Premium.

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