

Establishment & Maintenance of Wildflowers

for USDA Programs in Alabama

Alabama Guide Sheet No. AL 327



Establishment

Four to six weeks prior to planting, have the soil analyzed for pH level and fertility. The County Extension System or NRCS office can assist if you have questions regarding a soil test. Many plants grow well at a pH range from 6.0 to 7.0. Generally most wildflowers prefer a well-drained, sunny location. Some species are shade and water loving wildflowers as well. Wildflowers do not generally require a lot of soil preparation. An effective means of killing grass and weeds is by spraying the area to be planted with an herbicide such as glyphosphate (Roundup). Refer to the label for ornamental site preparation. You must read and follow all chemical labels completely before using any pesticide or herbicide. A second herbicide application may be necessary prior to planting if there is weed regrowth. If a second herbicide application is applied, wait at least two weeks before direct sowing of wildflower seeds.

If there is no weed regrowth after two weeks, lightly cultivate the soil to a depth of 1/2 to 2 inches. Deeper tilling brings viable weed seed to the surface. If the site is on an erodible slope, a light application of low nitrogen fertilizer (8-8-8) at the seedling stage will help to establish wildflowers. If pH levels are below 5.0, lime should be applied at the level recommended from the soil test.

Perennials should be sown in early fall, September 1-December 1. Fall plantings done prior to periods of rainfall will insure an early display of flowers the following spring.

Seeding Recommendations

<u>Perennial Species</u>	<u>Seeding Rates</u> lbs/acre
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>)	2
Butterfly weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)	10
Coreopsis/Tickseed (<i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>)	10
Moss Verbena (<i>Verbena tenuisecta</i>)	6
Ox-eye Daisy (<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>)	5
Showy Primrose (<i>Oenothera speciosa</i>)	1
Stiff Vervain (<i>Verbena stricta</i>)	3

On small areas, broadcast seeds evenly by hand or use a drop spreader. It is helpful to mix clean, dry sand with the seed. The sand adds volume and aids in even distribution. The recommendation is 1 to 2 parts sand:1 part seed. Lightly cover the seeds. On large areas drills are most effective. Drill to a maximum of 1/4 inch and firm soil. This maximizes the seed/soil contact.

After seeding, a light layer of mulch should be applied to the soil surface. A high quality wheat straw is suitable for this purpose. A mulch containing weed seed should not be used.

Some seeds will germinate 10 to 20 days after planting, whereas other seeds will only germinate in early spring of the following year. Best germination will occur in planting locations with at least six hours of direct sunlight per day, little foot traffic, and frequent watering if rainfall is not plentiful.

While most wildflowers suitable for field plantings are drought tolerant, water is necessary for germination and proper seedling development.

Maintenance

During the first two years of establishment, good maintenance to control weeds is critical to the establishment of the wildflowers. It can later be maintained by annual mowing. Mow wildflowers after the nesting season (mid March through late August) when the summer blooming species have begun to fade and the fall blooming species have yet to bloom. Mowing in midwinter controls invasive woody species and helps with seed dispersal. Set the mower at a height of no lower than 6 inches.

Many wildflowers benefit from some fertilization if the soil is depleted of nutrients. Some flowers do fine in poor soil. A soil test is recommended when soil quality is unknown. When fertilizing be sure to use a low nitrogen fertilizer such as 5-10-10. Organic materials add nutrients, enhance soil texture, and encourage beneficial microorganisms.

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