

Wildflowers for Michigan

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The wildflower trial was initiated on July 22, 1994 at the Hancock Turfgrass Research Center. Seed for the trial was provided by Grass Roots, Inc. of East Lansing, The Michigan Wildflower Farm of Portland, and Amturf Seeds of Brighton. The trial consists of annual wildflowers from California, native perennial wildflowers from Michigan, and native prairie grass species such as big bluestem and little bluestem. Also, combinations of annual or perennial wildflowers and native grasses were planted. The purpose of this trial is to demonstrate the potential of wildflower and native grasses for landscapes in Michigan.

The trial has each type of wildflower or prairie grass planting duplicated, once where the soil was surface sterilized with BASAMID soil sterilant and a second time where the soil was not sterilized prior to planting. The difference between these two establishment methods is dramatic.

Wildflowers have suffered from poor marketing and unrealistic expectations of their performance.

Wildflowers are slow to establish and require more maintenance than many have been led to believe.

While wildflowers can develop into a relatively low maintenance area which provides a good alternative to traditional landscape options, it will take 3-5 years for a native Michigan wildflower prairie to become well established. During this time maintenance requirements can approach those of a more traditional landscape. Do not plant wildflowers if you do not plan on maintaining them during establishment or if you are looking for a cheap, quick fix. The concept of throwing out some wildflower seed and ending up with a beautiful meadow full of color is not realistic.

Wildflowers have some tremendous benefits. When well-established, a wildflower planting is a relatively low maintenance area when compared to a more traditional landscape. Wildflower plantings are aesthetically beautiful and change in their beauty throughout the season.

When using native Michigan wildflowers, you in essence preserve a piece of Michigan's heritage that is hundreds of years old. You are getting a snapshot of what our country looked like when only native Americans were present.

Wildflowers add diversity to a landscape. The various flowers and grasses provide food sources, habitat, nesting sites, and overwintering protection to an equally or more diverse population of animals. Small mammals, birds, insects, including moths and butterflies are just some of the animals that will be part of a prairie wildflower ecosystem.

Wildflowers require no pesticides or chemical fertilizers, stabilize and improve the soil, filter nutrients and harmful chemicals prior to reaching the groundwater and actually promote natural control of damaging insects in others parts of the garden or landscape by providing habitat for beneficial insects and other animals that prey on pests.

For the most persistent wildflower planting use species native to Michigan. These forms and grasses are well adapted to our soils and climate, having evolved here over thousands of years. If possible, use seed that has been collected or increased from native Michigan sources. A species may be native to Michigan but if you use seed adapted to Missouri it may not do well in our state.