

Naturalizing with Wildflowers

by F. Dan Dinelli, Ass't. Supt.
North Shore C.C., Glenview, IL

Naturalizing with wild flowers is an adventure much different from that of cultivated gardening or growing turf. The use of wildflowers offers an opportunity to use an adverse habitat, and to accentuate nature. Use of wildflowers, especially on golf courses, has been justified by their low cost and low maintenance. I believe there are many other arguments for advocating the use of these modest yet romantic plantings.

I have met few people who do not like flowers. Croly wrote, "Flowers are nature's jewels, whose wealth she decks her summer beauty." Flowers brighten up our lives and are a great way to break up conformity. Unlike turf or cultivated flower beds, wild flower gardens offer an ever changing progression of color and textures. The fast growing annuals are the first to fill in, baby's breath and snapdragons offer a soft texture with whites and pinks. In progression, corn poppies dominate with their brilliant splashes of vibrant reds, pinks and whites. This stage appears to be everyone's favorite, the colors are so radiant they seem to glow at night. Next the area turns to a sea of powder blue, as the bachelor buttons emerge. With each visit the field offers a different scenic attraction.

However, as odd as it may seem wildflower plantings offer more than just beautiful flowers. They offer opportunity for interesting wild life. Few environments are more sterile than a well manicured turf; it is an unnatural and vulnerable monoculture. Turf itself, is one of the most impoverished bird habitats on earth. While some birds such as robins and starlings will feed on grassy areas, goldfinches and song birds will be attracted to the seeds of bachelor's buttons, cornflowers, thistles and others. Butterflies, who display beautiful fleeting splashes of color will be attracted to goldenrod, mallow, Queen Anne's lace and thistle. Occasionally, a hummingbird can be found seeking the sweet nectar of snapdragons or dianthus. Honeybees keep the garden alive and buzzing with their restlessness. Though bees can be a hazard, due to stings, these pollinators are indispensable inhabitants on this planet.

Wild flower planting sites might include problem areas, such as hill sides which are difficult to mow; low wet areas which are difficult to drain; or shaded areas where turf will not thrive. An area can be selected that will be far enough out of plan and offer a



pleasant scene. It is nice to select areas that can be viewed from more than one golf hole. Consulting with the pro may be of some help in selecting an area.

The size of the area is not as important as the shape and location. Interesting contours on a gradual slope are pleasing. The area may include trees or shrubs. Wildflowers play "survival of the fittest". They will in time select the habitat which suits their needs. The more diverse the soil, moisture and shade, the more diverse the flowers will be. The wildflowers in the garden that North Shore Country Club planted in 1983 has already segregated into their own niches.

Many seed houses, garden centers and suppliers offer wildflower seed mixtures. Distributors, supplying the most complete mixes, formulate them for different geographic regions or different climatic areas as to wet or dry. For each, the mainstays are perennials native to the regions, or perennials which are best suited to the growing conditions. For this reason a mix with a high percentage of perennials is desirable. A mix may contain as many as 20 different annuals, biennials and perennials to provide a continuous period of bloom. Some firms list varieties separately, enabling you to select those best suited to your locality or interests. There has been some concern as to whether wild flowers invade lawn or surrounding areas. I have not noticed such a problem. However, two pest species should be avoided. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaris*) and siderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*) are aggressive pushy plants that may create a problem. Purple loosestrife is so prolific, it is threatening our natural wet lands. Currently most seed companies have excluded these species. Non-aggressive grasses, such as hard fescues, may be added to the mix if planting is done on a slope, or where erosion may be a problem. Hard or sheep fescues offer quick germination, providing soil

stabilization. However, it should be noted that aggressive grasses, such as bluegrasses or bentgrasses are wildflower's worst enemy. For this reason fertilizing is not recommended. It is believed fertilizing promotes weeds and excessive vegetative growth. Never-the-less, I fertilized half of one of our gardens with Superphosphate and these flowers held their blooms longer. I believe high nitrogen fertilizers are the culprits.

Spring is the best time to plant most wildflower mixes, preferably as soon as the soil is workable. The idea is to provide ample time and proper condition for the plants to germinate, grow, flower and set seed. For the annuals, that is the only way to ensure the next generation. Recommended planting rates vary on seed mixes. Generally 4-7 pounds per acre are sufficient to establish a good ground cover. I like to increase the rate by 50%. This gives a quick establishment of thick flowers. However, if too high a rate is used, the quick germinating annuals may shade out the next phase.

We prepared the bed at North Shore Country Club by first spraying the area with roundup at its recommended rate. Ten days later the area was rototilled with a tractor mount tiller. This was done until the soil had a fine texture 3-4 inches deep. The bed was then raked firm with a sand pro. Marking paint was used to create a grid to assist in the hand broadcasting of seed. Miorganite was used as a filler to aid in even seed dispersion. After seeding, the area was dragged with a piece of chain link fence to lightly cover the seeds with soil. Finally the bed was rolled, and lightly irrigated until seedlings were well established. Alternative applications may include hydroseeding or the use of a No-Till Rangeland Grass Drill. This special drill seeder is especially good for overseeding older wildflower areas that have lost most of their annuals.

(cont'd. page 18)

"Frenzer, Inc."

Henry Frenzer started as a Peat and Humus supplier for the Chicago area in 1949 with our first bog in Wheeling, Illinois. At that time there was much bulk material sold to landscapers and garden shops who would sell it by the bushel not only out of their sales yards, but by driving down the residential streets and literally going from house to house selling the material as the truck went slowly down the street.

As the years went by, business changed and a revival of some sort was needed. It was suggested to us by a local golf course construction company working in the area at that time that a top dressing material was needed to be made in bulk amounts as there was no one in the area doing this type of service.

In 1963 we started producing top dressing for sale in the Chicago area courses.

At that time there were 3 employees and 1 seven yard truck for delivery. In 1964 we incorporated and moved the mixing and screening operation to its present site in Algonquin.

In the beginning it was basically one mixture that was made on a constant basis. Today as you all know, it has become more of a custom mix operation with all different types of mixtures and sands being used.

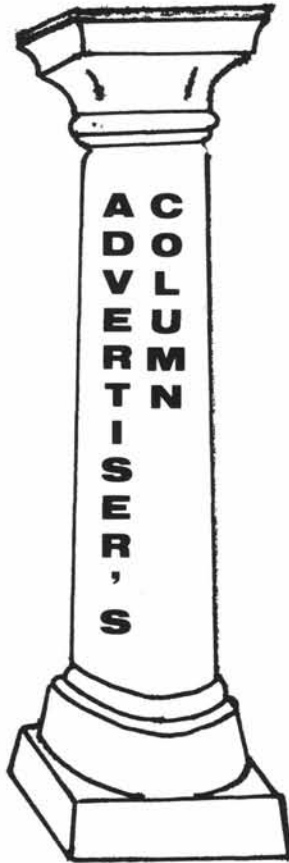
The present delivery system has changed from the original seven yard truck to 4 twelve to fourteen yard trucks and in the peak seasons, semis and other trucks are hired to help out.

We have delivered our product to customers as far as Milwaukee, Rock Island, Springfield, Danville, Decatur, and east to South Bend.

At the present time, there are 6 employees handling the mixing, screening, delivery, bookwork and other related duties.

As in every business, we try our utmost to accommodate our customers in the best way possible and can continue to do so in the future years to come.

Al Frenzer



This helps in natural reseeding of annuals. However, if an ongoing annual display is important, overseeding with a mixture of annual species may be necessary every 3-5 years.

The use of wildflowers, native grasses or prairie restoration is exciting. I am sure the membership at our club enjoyed the wildflowers. There have been more photos taken of the wildflower areas than were ever taken of the "prestigious" 18th green. I realize golf course superintendent's first priority is providing the best playing conditions for the game of golf. But, I believe a close second is to create a diverse, exciting environment, which will provide interest and enjoyment of the outdoors for those who play the game we depend on.

CENTURY CONTRACTORS, INC.

4011 W. 165 St., Tinley Park, IL 60477 (312) 596 • 7645

GOLF COURSE EXCAVATING GREEN CONSTRUCTION

Will tailor any project to include your
personnel to keep your costs down.

SOIL SAMPLES CAN HELP

- Produce disease resistant, high-vitality plants
 - Grow nursery stock faster, sell faster
 - Estimate jobs more accurately
 - Cut replacement costs
- And it's done as easily as
mailing a letter!

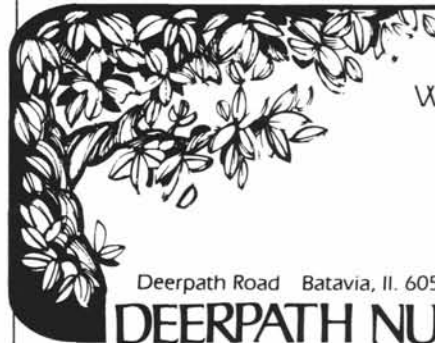
Top-Soil

Testing Service Co.

Call or mail your soil

815/469-2530

27 Ash Street • Frankfort, IL 60423



Weeping Willow

[Salix niobe]

staked straight stems
2-4" caliper

Deerpath Road Batavia, IL 60510 312/879-0120

DEERPETH NURSERIES

TENNIS COURTS

Construction — Resurfacing

M-C Sport Systems, Inc.
Addison, IL

John Maniscalco

312/628-0500

(Wildflowers cont'd.)
(also top of next column)

Maintenance of wildflowers is generally low. However, hand weeding may be necessary until wildflowers establish themselves. Mowing is desirable in helping to keep out some weeds and woody plants. We mow our gardens late in the fall when all the seed heads are set. A mulcher attachment is used at its highest setting. If possible we try to mow after a prolonged dry spell. The soil forms cracks, allowing seeds to find their way into the cracks as the leaves and stems are left as mulch.