

# Experiences with Wildflowers

by Tony Rzadzki, Cantigny Golf

In recent years the once infamous patch of weeds that had to be mowed has gained great popularity with the general public. I am referring to the current rave of wild flower planting. The wild look is in, and people are accepting the natural beauty that wildflowers can provide. With this favor in mind and the acceptance of the natural look versus the daily manicuring of high maintenance golf facilities, golf course superintendents should be jumping at the opportunity to naturalize areas on their golf courses, especially those that are involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.



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I believe that all of us, if we look hard enough, can find areas even as small as your living room that could become a wildflower habitat. A small bed near a tee or green, possibly an area adjacent to a pond or even a pond bank, a two or three foot wide area that borders a tree line, any of these small areas would not have to be maintained once your bed is established. An area that was once turf or hard to maintain would now be covered with flowers!

What I would like to discuss in this article is the basic labor that is needed to establish wildflowers areas, and some alternatives that have also worked for me at my golf course.

## Establishment

Once you have decided to establish wildflowers in an area no matter what the size, some basic preparations must be made. Any of the first three methods mentioned below can be used to remove the turf and create a bed.

1. Spray the area with herbicide to kill the turf.
2. Remove the sod with a sod cutter.
3. Disc, rototill, rake, or spade and rake smooth with a garden rake, gill tool, or harrow.
4. Once you have a nice planting bed and you used method number one to remove the turf, you may want to wait a week or more and respray any weeds that regenerate. Wait one more week then you are ready to sow your seeds.
5. Evenly spread your seeds and cover with ¼ ince of soil.
6. If you can, cover the area with a mulch or stray to help retain water and keep weed seeds out.
7. Keep your bed moist until plants have well established themselves. Water is critical to these plants for the first three weeks.
8. You will need to mow this area in late fall at a height of 4 inches. Leave the plants there, they provide a mulch for the new seeds that have been produced and spread by your mower.

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OFFICIAL NOTICE  
ANNUAL MEETING  
Midwest Association of  
Golf Course Superintendents, Inc.  
NOVEMBER 10, 1993  
Medinah Country Club

## AGENDA

- I. Roll Call
- II. Minutes of 1992 Annual Meeting
- III. Communications
- IV. Report of Officers
  - A. President, Tim Kelly
  - B. Vice President, Alan Fierst
  - C. Secretary/Treasurer, Joel Purpur
- V. Committee Chairman Reports
  - A. Arrangements, Kevin Czerkies
  - B. Education, Kerry Blatteau
  - C. Golf, Ed Brawnsky
  - D. By-Laws, Ray Schmitz
  - E. Employment, Tim Kelly
  - F. Membership, Mike Bavier
  - G. Long Range Planning, Don Cross
  - H. Public Relations, Dave Blomquist
  - I. Editorial, Fred Opperman
  - J. Executive Secretary, Penny Meyer
  - K. Past Presidents Council, Roger Stewart
  - L. Commercial Advisory Council, John Lebedevs
  - M. Benevolence, Mike Bavier
- VI. Unfinished Business
- VII. New Business
  - A. Annual Election  
Slate of Candidates  
For President—Alan Fierst  
For Vice President—Joel Purpur  
For Sec./Treas.—Don Cross  
For Director  
(3-2 year term, 1-1year term)  
Dave Blomquist, Ed Brawnsky  
Don Ferreri, Rory Bancroft,  
Bob Maibusch
  - B. Present New Board of Directors
  - C. Pass Gavel
- VIII. Adjournment

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## “Oktoberfest”

Mother Nature and Jack Frost have Their Day,  
Planning October's delightful display.  
Harvest the Crops, Enjoy the Feast,  
Dance to the Music, the Halloween Beat.  
Oktoberfest with It's colorful Leafy Blast,  
The End of the Year's coming on fast.  
Look at the Leaves, seems a bit Queer,  
I thought We got rid of Them last year?

Kenneth R. Zanzig

## WILDFLOWERS (continued from page 16)

9. Depending on your area a control burn can also be done, this helps keep out undesirable weeds and adds organic matter to the soil. Burn in late fall or early spring before nesting birds return and be sure to contact your local fire marshal before attempting this.

Probably the most important point that I will make in this whole article is this: be patient, **BE PATIENT, BE PATIENT!**

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I believe that to a great extent patience was the demise of wildflowers in past years. The instant gratification that the planting of annual flowers provides is well understood by everyone. But, annuals require maintenance. Our society seems to be changing and if the words ... natural ... or environmentally friendly ... are used these days, whatever the subject, it is readily acceptable even if it takes some time to produce.

You as the sower of the seed understand the plant's physiology. You know that for the first months of your new wildflower area that your plants are going to look like weeds. You know that in a year the bed will look better and the following years that it will look gorgeous! Make sure that your greens chairman and committee understand this process. That depending on the type of wildflower seed that you use, this is a long term proposition, and that the end result will greatly benefit your golf club.

One thing that can be done if you are seeding a large area is to ask your chairman if you can put up a sign that says 'Habitat Production Area' or 'Wildlife Production Area'. This shows your golfers that you are concerned about your environment and that you are soon to have a natural habitat grace your course.

### Alternatives

Wildflowers are beautiful but so are wild grasses. Grasses can provide you with an area that may not be as colorful, but the native texture may be just what you desire.

Native grasses such as fescue, swithgrass, buffalograss and the like require a different method of planting. If the area is clear and fairly weed free, loosen the soil to only a quarter of an inch deep and broadcast seed. Then roll the seed to get good seed to soil contact. Another method is to use a drill seeder. No till drilling or till drilling are both acceptable methods to show your seed. Grasses require firm soil so over tilling can prove detrimental to your project and also cause soil erosion.

One other method that we have used that I know most golf courses can achieve is to use a core aerifier. A pull behind aerifier instead of a self-propelled unit would probably perform better in tight soils, so if you have a large area and do not have a large tractor mounted rake or drill seeder, an aerifier can do the job.

Frost seeding is another method that we have used. If you have a fairly weed free area to seed, broadcast seed over the area. You can begin in early March. As winter leaves the moisture gathered in the spring and frost cracks allow the seed

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YOUR NAME BADGES  
AT OUR MEETINGS.**

to develop and germinate. Later in the year, mow the competing weeds, but not too short as to cause windrowing over your newly developing plants. If the area you choose has weed or turf cover on it and you would like to frost seed, chisel plow or disc the area in the fall and apply a herbicide. Then the following spring you will be ready for seeding.

Wildflower seed can be expensive. I have purchased seed and paid over \$600 to seed just two acres. Here are some alternative means to acquire seed that you may want to investigate before developing an area, especially if you are on a tight budget.

1. I am a member of Pheasants Forever. Pheasants Forever is a national organization dedicated to the 'protection and enhancement of pheasant and other wildlife populations'. If your course is located near a local chapter of Pheasants Forever, contact them. They may provide you with the seed and even plant it for you. Their national headquarters phone number is (612) 481-7142.

2. Contact your local soil conservation district, Department of Conservation, or your cooperative extension service. Some states or local agencies have programs available or may be able to inform you where you can get seed at a better rate.

3. Another method you could try is to **not mow an area** and let the natural grasses and wildflowers grow in. Later you could purchase potted wildflowers and plug them in throughout the area. These plants will seed and eventually more will develop.

4. One unique method that we have used is the propagation of native nuts, not local crazies, but oaks, hickory, chestnut, or walnut. On our course we collected hundreds of burr oak acorns, stratified them, then potted them. The seedlings that later developed, we transplanted into a 10 acre area that we have left unmowed for the last three years. The seedlings are growing well and our eventual goal is to create an 'Oak Savannah' in an area that was disrupted during original course construction.

5. Another plant market that could be pursued is the agricultural market. There is an enormous wealth of plant material available that has been developed in the Ag business, but for one reason or another may not be the most high yield grain that a farmer desires. Smaller varieties may suit some niche on your course. If you can imagine a field of waving wheat, or the scarlet, purple hues of a field milo in autumn, the outstanding habitat that they create for gamebirds and songbirds, it is hard to ignore the benefits that these products can give.

The thought of an agricultural plant on a golf course will raise eyebrows. Especially from green committees, but the right plant in the proper place can add stunning habitat. I planted a two acre plot of sorghum in an area that we once used as our compost dump. It is between two fairways and screened on one side by large oaks and the other side by a large wildflower berm. I did not sow the seeds in a row, but after discing the area, I simply broadcast the seed. I wanted to have the sorghum establish with the weeds because eyebrows were raised at my course about the use of an agricultural crop. Well, the end result was beautiful. The sorghum developed rapidly and outgrew the weeds so that the stalks and seed heads protrude at a perfect three and half foot height. I chose a variety that would not get over four foot high and become too overwhelming.

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