

# Why wildflowers? ...Why not?



**Wildflowers are economical and need little maintenance and irrigation. But most of all, people love them.**

■ Because of wildflowers, Kiawah Island is like a pretty young belle who knows she's pretty.

April's cover of sweet alyssum—it looks like snow—gives way, as May arrives, to bold, sassy blossoms. Winking, waving black-eyed Susans. Orange California poppy. Yellow, lavender and white cosmos.

Summer's arrival coaxes up expanding circles of sun-yellow coreopsis, gaillardia and lemon-mint.

South Carolina's Kiawah Island is a jewel of a resort location, but's a prettier jewel because of the changing tapestry of wildflowers.

**Why wildflowers?**—The answers are almost obvious, says Sara Edi Livingston, co-founder of the Wildflower Alliance of South Carolina.

**1)** Their beauty. Color affects people profoundly. "The bottom line is that people will come to see color," says Livingston. "If we have a beautiful little place tucked away that people feel like they've discovered, then it will make them want to buy property there."

**2)** They are drought-tolerant, help control erosion and are reduced maintenance.

**3)** They often thrive in conditions that won't support exotics.

Tons of landscape waste churned up by

Hurricane Hugo ended up on Bass Pond just three years ago. "Those were the worst planting conditions possible," says Livingston. "The pH level was only 3.5.

"For my work, I don't have clients who are willing to invest two years to rid a site of weeds before we ever even plant a wildflower," says Livingston. "Therefore, by generally following this program of ground preparation, we were able to speed up the process and plant wildflowers the first season."

**4)** Wildflowers are usually not as affected by insects as exotics, and they use existing groundwater.

**5)** They cost far less to introduce and maintain. Installation costs for wildflowers are 8 to 10 cents per square foot, compared to \$4 per square foot to plant perennial or annual bedding plants, and 68 to 75 cents per square foot for sod, says Livingston.

**6)** A wildflower development shows that somebody cares, whether it's a resort manager, a golf course superintendent, or the developer of an apartment complex or office building.

"I think everybody is beginning to become aware that not only can wildflowers save money and effort, but they also show that someone is being environmentally sensitive," says Livingston.

**7)** Wildflowers allow developers to take highly maintained areas and return them back to environmentally protected areas and provide excellent wildlife habitat.

"I'm really excited about being part of a movement to bring back plants that are more natural, require less maintenance and are beautiful," she adds.

The changing tapestry of color transformed Bass Pond five times in the first year, from white to solid yellow, red, lavender and purple.

## Planting a prairie-type wildflower site:

■ **1)** Take a soil sample of the site to be planted. Instructions should specify that the crop is to be "Wildflowers" and indicate whether or not irrigation is available.

**2)** Amend the soil based on the recommendation from the soil sample.

**3)** Schedule the planting to be done after the date of the last possible frost. The annuals will be killed by a late freeze.

**4)** Mow the area to be planted with the mower blades set as low as possible.

**5)** Rake the residue thatch and remove it from the site.

**6)** Prepare the seed for distribution by mixing it in a container with a ratio of one-part seed to four-parts damp sand.

**7)** Stir the seed/sand mixture thoroughly. This will scratch the outer coat of the seeds which will encourage better germination of some species. The damp sand

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## For grass-free wildflower sites

■ **1)** Mow if the grasses and weeds are exceptionally high.

**2)** Spray with the herbicide Roundup, mixed at the recommended distribution rate.

**3)** Wait two weeks, then till the site thoroughly to expose dormant weed seeds.

**4)** Wait two weeks for weeds to germinate, then apply Roundup again.

**5)** Wait two weeks, till again, then distribute seeds according to directions for prairie-type wildflower site.

—These instructions have been prepared by Livingston Landscape Architects of Mt. Pleasant, S.C. For more information, contact: Wildflowers, P.O. Box 12001, Charleston, SC 29412.

# Safety vs. time vs. money: the rec facility 'Catch 22'

**Half of the word 'budget' is 'get.' Here are some suggestions on how to 'get' enough money for your facility.**

■ "Kids have as much right to expect safely maintained fields as professionals do," says Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Parks & Recreation Department. "The ability to play shouldn't affect the safety of the fields.

"That's put us in a real dilemma: to work on limited budgets and still maintain a level of public expectations. And television has increased those expectations. That becomes a very challenging demand. Everyone wants their kid's field to look like Wrigley Field or Mile High Stadium."

Moellendorf has four people (including three seasonals) to maintain 11 scattered ballfields.

"Liability and litigation have changed the concept of our profession," he says. "Fields they used to play on no longer



**Roger Moellendorf:**  
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meet the expectations of today."

So what is the answer?

"We have to work smarter and harder," Moellendorf observes. "We have to become salesmen and campaigners to include maintenance dollars in the budget. The best way to do that is to hang our hats on

the safety issue.

"We also have to campaign with the public; they put too much emphasis on appearance and not enough on playability and safety."

Moellendorf believes that there should be a maintenance and safety audit conducted on every new project. "It sounds basic, but I'll guarantee it's not always done. It's not always easy, either."

Mark Doble of Western Sod has some suggestions for dealing with budget considerations.

"Half of the word 'budget' is 'get,'" he says. "It's a show-and-tell: 'If you give me this, I'll give you this.'"

Doble says that you have to sell yourself before you can sell your department and projects. "Please keep off the grass" is, literally, a sign of the times," he notes.

Doble says you must have a plan of attack:  
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## 18 tips for saving money on athletic fields

■ Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Department of Parks and Recreation and Greg Petry of the Waukegan (Ill.) Park District make these suggestions for saving time and money:

**1)** Develop standards for employees. Bring people in for training rather than sending out employees.

**2)** Work with other entities, like school districts, to share facilities.

**3)** Put more emphasis on general-purpose fields. Pitcher's mounds, for instance, are temporary on Green River's fields, so the fields can be used for more than baseball diamonds.

**4)** Try to use native materials whenever possible.

**5)** Try pre-germinated seed, a proven time-saver.

**6)** Use multi-purpose equipment. Moellendorf's district has a sweeper used for winter sidewalks that is also used as a dethatcher during the summer. It "does a fairly good job," he observes.

**7)** Work with local sports organizations. In Green River, the Little League association purchased home run wall fencing. Petry also asked the Waukegan baseball association to include extra fees and kick back money for field maintenance.

**8)** Work with staff, management and

commissioners, to develop a priority list, a "total evaluation of costs and benefits."

**9)** "Look at the big picture," Petry suggests. Look at how each dollar is spent, including employee raises (merit raises only?) and liability insurance increases.

**10)** Make a public relations effort in the community. "There are certain things we're going to have to give and to take away from the public," Petry notes. "We have to balance everything, and that's the hard part because it affects people."

**11)** Take advantage of early-pay discounts, and ask vendors for bigger discounts.

**12)** Take bids on any major service or purchase. "If you really make these guys sharpen their pencils, they will," Petry says.

**13)** Put clamps on absenteeism, and control overtime.

**14)** Focus on work simplification, keeping to the same routines.

**15)** Focus on preventive maintenance.

**16)** Minimize defects. "If you don't have time to do it right the first time, you don't have time to re-do it," Petry says.

**17)** Make sure employees are oriented to equipment, safety, etc.

**18)** Ask vendors if your fields can be used as experimental areas.

—J.R.

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will stick to the seeds, making it easier to achieve a more even seed distribution.

**8)** Distribute the seeds by "feeding the chickens". We do not recommend using a rotary-type seed machine that fits across the chest as the tiniest seeds shift to the bottom, and results in poor distribution.

**9)** Drag the site with a fence weighted by a heavy pole or roll with a water-filled drum if the site is large.

**10)** Mulch with a fine layer of pine straw or hay to hold the seeds in place and discourage raiding by birds.

**11)** Water the site if possible.

**12)** The cotyledons and "true leaves" should begin to show in five to six weeks.

**13)** If grass or weeds become a problem, apply the herbicide Poast as recommended, disturbing the site as little as possible.

**14)** Do not mow the site until the annuals have set seed. Set the mower blade high enough to leave the leaf rosette of the perennials which will serve as a green ground cover during the winter.