

Wildflowers for the 'burbs?

■ Wildflowers in residential areas? You bet.

Direct seeding of wildflowers is less expensive than using bedding plants. Wildflowers are hardy and, in many cases, drought tolerant. Wildflowers also offer a casual, natural look—that bit of wilderness so desired by many homeowners today.

Does that mean advising homeowners to turn their properties into a wildflower meadows? Not at all.

Neighbors may not appreciate it. The homeowner may love wildflowers, but neighbors, some anyway, may perceive them as weeds. Also, some communities have laws against allowing lawns to grow too tall. A wildflower area is, admittedly, not a lawn, but these complaints are common enough to be bothersome. Deal with neighbor and local regulatory issues before beginning. Then plan the wildflower areas carefully. Likely residential wildflower sites include a slope in the back of a property or a side yard.

Matching the kind of wildflower mixture with specific site is the next step. How much sun does the area receive? There are wildflowers that grow in sunny, dry areas as well as those which grow in cool, shady spots which get at least one to four hours of sunlight daily. Decide what kind of mixture suits the desires of the homeowner best. All one color? A tall mixture?

A multitude of mixtures are available, even custom blending for larger seeded areas. Most mixtures contain both perennials and annuals. Most annuals will give a brilliant show the first year, but usually don't reseed. They help con-



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trol weeds and add vibrant color to the planting during the first year. Most perennials will bloom from the second year on.

Proper preparation of the planting site is critical for wildflower success. Remove existing vegetation, tilling the soil to a depth of three to four inches. Remove weed seed from the soil, either by repeated tilling or by repeated use of a general herbicide such as Roundup or Kleenup.

Wildflower seeds can be planted in spring, early summer or fall. Typical seeding rates for small areas are one ounce per 250 square feet or one pound to cover 4000 square feet. A one-acre planting will need 5-20 pounds of seed, depending on the site and mixture used.

To make seeding easier, mix the seed with sand or vermiculite. Then spread the mixture by hand or with a small cyclone seeder. The seeds should be covered lightly by raking or by covering with $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of fine peat.

Keep the ground evenly moist until the seedlings become established, usually within 4-6 weeks. This is particularly important if seeds are sown in late spring or early summer. Although it may not be practical to hand-weed large wildflower plantings, it greatly enhances the beauty of the site to remove weeds. Mow, at a height of 4-6 inches, at the end of the growing season.

New hosta cultivars

■ Hostas are one of the best partial sun/full-shade perennials.

"Anything with yellow in it will tolerate more sun," says Debbie Frey, horticulturist with Bailey Nurseries, Inc., St. Paul, Minn. "But as a rule, hostas are suited to part shade or shade."

Light sun for plants means 3 hours or less per day. Full sun is 6-8 hours a day; partial sun is 4-6 hours of direct sunlight.

Frey says there are some new hosta varieties on the market.

"There aren't thousands of cultivars to choose from, but here are some newer varieties on the market to think about."

Here's Frey's list of new hosta choices:

Hosta 'Aspen Gold' is a large specimen plant with gold leaves that are crinkled and cupped.

Hosta 'Francee' is a variegated type with dark forest green leaves

with a bright, crisp white edge. A good choice for potting, it blooms in August with a lavender flower on plants that are 15-to 18 inches tall.

Hosta 'Ginko Craig' is a small-starred plant that's great for edging the garden bed, with long narrow dark green leaves with a narrow white border along the leaf.

Hosta 'Great Expectations' is a large specimen plant; the leaf has a very wide, irregular margin of blue and green surrounding a light yellow-cream center, very puckered.

Hosta 'Patriot' has leaves with forest green centers, accented by a broad, cream colored margin on plants up to 18-inches tall. It likes more sun than the average hosta to retain its color.

Hosta 'Shade Fanfare' is a variegated variety; leaves have a light green to gold center accented by a broad, cream-colored margin on plants up to 18-inches tall. It needs more sun to retain its color.