

CREATE YOUR OWN MINI-MEADOW

By Ralph E. Mitchell, Director/Horticulture Agent - UF/IFAS Extension Service, Charlotte County

Planting native wildflowers from seed is becoming a popular gardening activity in Florida. There is actually a wildflower seed industry in Florida that helps supply the demand. Plantings of wildflowers can be considered "low maintenance", but not "no maintenance" as they do need some attention from time to time. Whether you want to try to plant a small spot of wildflowers in your yard in an attempt to create a "mini-meadow", or something larger, growing wildflowers from seed can be a pleasant experience.

To start your "mini-meadow", find a good sunny location that is well-drained and as weed-free as possible. Many wildflowers don't mind soils with low fertility. Avoid sites that have a lot of the weed known as nutsedge, a very aggressive and hard to control weed. A spot that has a thin turf cover, may be found in a sparse Bahia grass site in sandy soil is another good area for wildflowers. Avoid trying to grow wildflowers like a traditional flower garden; however, as the weeds will most always win.

Your next step is to select the wildflowers that you want to grow. Take a look at the Florida Native Plant Society webpage at www.fnps.org/pages/plants/plants_by_county.php?county=CHARLOTTE to find out which plants will grow well in Charlotte County. Finding a source of the seed is another task to tackle. One good clearinghouse is the Florida Wildflowers Growers Cooperative at www.floridawildflowers.com/seedpacket.htm. Wildflowers that you may consider growing would include various species of coreopsis (also known as tickseed), blanketflower, and black-eyed Susan.



Don't install your wildflower garden until September or October in our part of Florida. Not only is this the best time to plant wildflower seeds, but it also gives you time to properly prepare the site for planting. In what is called a no till or minimum till method, about a month before planting the seeds, prepare the site by applying a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate according to label directions to kill weeds and other vegetative material. Reapply this herbicide two-weeks later. About two weeks after that, mow all of the dead vegetation on the site and rake off any remaining clippings. Check the soil to make sure that there will be a good seed-to-soil contact by scratching or firming the soil as needed. Prepare the seed by mixing one-half of the seed with sand or vermiculite and slightly moisten the mixture. This will act as a carrier to evenly distribute the seed. Spread the seed/sand mixture from one end of the planting site to the other. Mix the other half of the seed and spread it in the opposite direction for an even and thorough application. Work the seed into the soil by walking over the area. You want the seed to be covered with between 1/8 to 1/4 inch of soil. Follow this up with watering the site with 1/4 to 1/2 an inch of water daily (keeping in mind your local watering restrictions and the weather) for

about two weeks to promote germination. Suppress the weeds as best as possible which may include mowing until the wildflower seedlings are larger. No fertilizer is really needed the first year as most of our wildflowers are well adapted to poor soil fertility. Fertilizer may not even be needed the second year. In fact, excess fertilizer may promote more vegetative growth at the expense of flowering, could increase the susceptibility of the wildflowers to pests, and will also boost weed growth.

If you work up a wildflower patch within a thin Bahia grass setting, no site preparation is needed other than mowing the grass just before seeding.

A great thing about wildflowers is their ability to reseed themselves. To this end, make sure to allow seed heads to mature on the plant and drop before mowing or cleaning up the site.

Mini-meadows can offer something different in your landscape that is colorful, interesting, and sustainable.

Resource:

Norcini, J.G. (2006) Establishing a Small Planting of Native Wildflowers from Seed. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Norcini, J.G. & Aldrich, J.H. (2004) Establishment of Native Wildflower Plantings by Seed. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

Norcini, J. (2006) Native Wildflower Seed Production in Florida. UF/IFAS Extension Service and FDACS.

For more information on all types of gardening questions, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our Plant Clinics are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden** (6900 Florida Street, PG) Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Ralph Mitchell (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com) is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County Extension Service. Contact a volunteer Master Gardener from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4351. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Also, our next Best Management Practices Training concerning the new [Fertilizer Ordinance](#) for Commercial Fertilizer Applicators is scheduled for September 18th at our office from 8:00am-3:00pm. There is a \$25.00 fee and lunch is provided. For more information, please call 941.764.4340.