“WILD” LANDSCAPING TAKES CAREFUL PLANNING

By Rob Grumbles, Extension Agent, AG

Gardening with wildflowers and other native plants does not mean gardening without design or plan. Whether the desired results are a landscape that “looks” like a natural planting or a more traditional style, the first step is developing a set of plans. Your landscape plan may include areas that are “wild” with wildflowers, with defined areas of native trees, shrubs, and perennials.

No matter what native landscape you choose, fall is the best time to plant wildflower seeds and container-grown trees, shrubs, and perennials. Fall’s cooler temperatures help container-grown plants establish more quickly. Wildflower seeds planted at this time may germinate when kept in moist soil or may require winter’s chilling temperatures to trigger spring germination.

Species selection should be based first on adaptability to the site conditions and second on color, size, and texture. Wildflower species may be selected based on blooming times, so there will be a succession of blooms over time.

Preparing your site for planting depends both on the site and where you use container-grown plants or seeds.

Container-grown plants will establish better with some soil preparation. Depending on the existing soil condition, you may need to add soil amendments. For instance, you might need to create drainage for clay soils, or help sandy soils retain water. Adding organic matter, perhaps from a compost heap, will provide nutrients as well as improve soil texture.
It is important to know the kind of soil the plants grow in naturally, and to provide some of those basic elements and characteristics. Most native plants will do well in “improved” soils, but some may grow much larger than they would naturally.

Once the site is prepared, seeds may be broadcast by hand. Mixing the seeds with moist sand will help ensure even distribution. Once the seeds are sown or plants are planted, they must have water to establish.

Native plants and wildflowers generally do not require fertilizer except in very sandy soil. Fertilizer often increases vegetative growth while lessening desire flower production.

The beauty of native landscaping is its diversity and adaptability. The plants are naturally adapted to the climatic conditions, conserving time and resources, and may be arranged in a traditional design, a wild natural design, or a combination of both.

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