

October 9, 2014



Growing California Native Wildflowers
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Blooming wildflowers are a little bit of natural California, and looking ahead two seasons -- signal that spring has really arrived after a wet and chilly winter.

The seeds from annual California native wildflowers can be planted in fall or spring. If you plant in the fall you let Mother Nature do the watering and don't have to worry about a sudden heat wave wiping out delicate seedlings.

After you have selected a spot that gets at least six hours of sun a day, rough up the soil and water it. This will encourage weeds to grow. After about a week you can cultivate out any weeds. Do this at least one more time before you plant your seeds.

If you have well-draining sandy or loamy soil, you should not have to amend it. But if you have clay soil, you should amend it to loosen it up; organic compost works well. Fertilizers are not necessary.

If you wish to attract native pollinators to a patch of flowers, plan on planting in a drift of at least 16 square feet of one type of flower. You could plant several drifts of different flowers next to one another, being sure to allow some walking space in between. The seed packet should tell you how much coverage you will get from each packet. Mixing in the seeds with something like sand before you broadcast will enable a more even distribution.

The seeds need to be in close contact with the soil to sprout. After sowing, walk around on them, gently, or put down boards and walk on those. Some gardeners distribute a light covering of leaves or twigs over the seeds, which protect them from winds and possibly confound predators a little bit, while helping the area retain moisture. Birds, slugs and rodents may go after your seeds and seedlings, so you may have to initially protect them as you would your vegetable garden.

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Plan to water gently but thoroughly after planting to keep the area moist until the seedlings emerge. Hopefully, you have timed your planting to coincide with winter rains. If not, or if you planted in later spring, you will have to water your flower patch whenever it looks droopy. California wildflowers are adapted to long dry periods, but young plants of any kind need moisture.

Annual native flowers will die at the end of their season, but hopefully the environment you have planted them in will encourage them to reseed, and in years to come you will have the reward and excitement of your wildflower patch coming back to life.

California native wildflower seeds are available in local nurseries. For a bigger selection, check out the internet. Be careful not to plant just generic wildflower seeds. Those are frequently not California natives and can become pests. Fairly reliable types for El Dorado County would be California poppy, birds-eye and globe gilia, baby-blue eyes, five spots, tidy tips, and clarkia.

For more in-depth information consult the following books: *California Native Gardening* by Helen Popper; *Gardening with a Wild Heart*, by Judith Larner Lowry; and *Native Treasures* by M. Nevin Smith.

The extra effort you put into your yard and garden areas this fall will pay big dividends next year. Learn how easy it is to “Put Your Garden to Bed” with UCCE Master Gardeners Cindy Young and Cheryl Turner at a free, three-hour UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County class this Saturday, October 18, 2014. Topics include yard and garden clean up, cool season planting, tool sharpening and cleaning, composting, mulching, pruning, the importance of collecting those valuable fall leaves AND MUCH MORE. This class is open to the public and starts at 9:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville California.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/ and <http://www.facebook.com/pages/El-Dorado-County-Master-Gardeners/164653119129>.