



Growing Wildflowers

By Brenda Eskelson



March 2016

1

Easement in front of my house this past May to establish street cred.

What I started with 5 years ago



November
2011

2

What I started with 5 years ago: I took up the newspaper and mulch that I usually put around the trees and spread the wildflower seed in late October. That was the extent of my soil preparation as I did not want to disturb the tree roots. I scarified the bluebonnet seeds before spreading and the mixed seeds I mixed with sand to spread and then just tamped them into the soil. I put up the little fences so dogs wouldn't disturb the seedlings. As you can see, there isn't much in the way of seedlings yet. These are all deciduous trees that lose their leaves around late December.

March 2013 (The azaleas were blooming)

Mid-March 2012



April 2012



3

So this is what the center bed looked like the following spring. April is primetime for bluebonnets.

Late March



I put mixed wildflowers in end beds. (Actually from following year because I didn't take many pictures the first year.)

April 2012 – I also threw some seed in the big bed in front and you can see the larkspur mixed in with the snapdragons and poppies. It is hard to keep the seed where you want it.



5

I threw some larkspur seeds into my big flower bed in front. (Snapdragons, poppies) See the resemblance of the larkspur to delphinium (same family), but much easier and cheaper to grow. This first attempt was successful enough that I started doing it every year. And every year I cleared out a little more of the grass around the trees to make the beds a little bigger.

Lemonade



January 2015

6

: Unfortunately the water main for our street goes through our easement. While I was out of town in early November 2014 workers from the new house going up across the street dug up a large part of the lawn between the ginkgo and the big Chinese Pistache to attach to the water main. It was a big mess, so I thought maybe it was a good opportunity to finally take off the rest of the grass. We hired some help, took up the remaining grass, dug a trench for rock along the edges and a little walkway for access to the water meter. The dirt is very clay and not very good quality, especially where they dug it up and put back not exactly in the right order. I spread 3 bags of Nature's Way Compost and 3 buckets of sand on the top. But that was the extent of my soil preparation. Wildflowers are not supposed to like rich soil and we certainly have that. They also need good drainage so it helps that the ground is slightly sloped to the street. With all this preparation, I didn't get the wildflower seed spread until the middle of November.

This is what it looked like in January. I had planted the lady-in-red the summer before because it doesn't mind the shade so much and left it. You can see there are a lot of wildflower seedlings, but there are quite a few weeds mixed in too. Little by little I carefully pulled up whatever I could positively identify as a weed.

Early March 2015



So this is what it looked like in early March I put up the sign in an attempt to keep the construction workers from stepping on the seedlings. We have a long empty curb so it was a favorite place to park. The toadflax is just starting to bloom which is the earliest flower in the mix.

Mid-March 2015



This is a couple of weeks later. The toadflax is really blooming as is the scarlet flax and the bluebonnets are just starting to bloom.

April 2015



A couple of weeks after that. A lot of scarlet flax and bluebonnets.

Late May 2015



Late May. The Chinese Pistache trees leaf out in May. The blanket flower is blooming, but you can see it is straining to find some sun.

Late
June
2015



I tried to leave the wildflowers as long as I could to let them drop seed but by late June it was looking kind of sad so I pulled everything out. I left a what I knew were perennials and spread a very thin layer of mulch over the whole thing.

October 2015 – seed balls



12

So this is October. You can see the mulch. Here's some of the rudbeckia, a perennial, blooming. This area is out from under the trees and gets a little more sun. Here's a candlestick plant that a bird must have dropped. Last year in October the garden club meeting was at the MDAnderson prairie garden. Our tour leader was Jaime Gonzalez, Conservation Education Director for the Katy Prairie Conservancy, and he told us about seed balls. (Hold up). They are a mixture of clay, compost, and seeds mixed with a little water, rolled into balls and allowed to dry. I'll give a recipe for it a little later. But the advantage of the seed balls is that everything the seeds need to survive is in the balls. Because of the mulch, I was worried about the seed contact with the ground, but I didn't have to worry about that with the seed balls. I just stomped one into the ground about a foot apart. I also used a little different mix of seeds that is more shade tolerant hoping the display would last a little longer (Native American Seed). I did spread some bluebonnet seeds around the ginkgo.

Mid-Feb 2016



So this what it looked like in February. You can see the wild flowers are coming up in little clusters from the seed balls. I did get some reseeding going on. The weeding was a little easier this year.

Mid March 2016



14

Mid-March. In general I liked this mix of flowers better than the year before. We also had a lot of rain this spring which the flowers seemed to like.

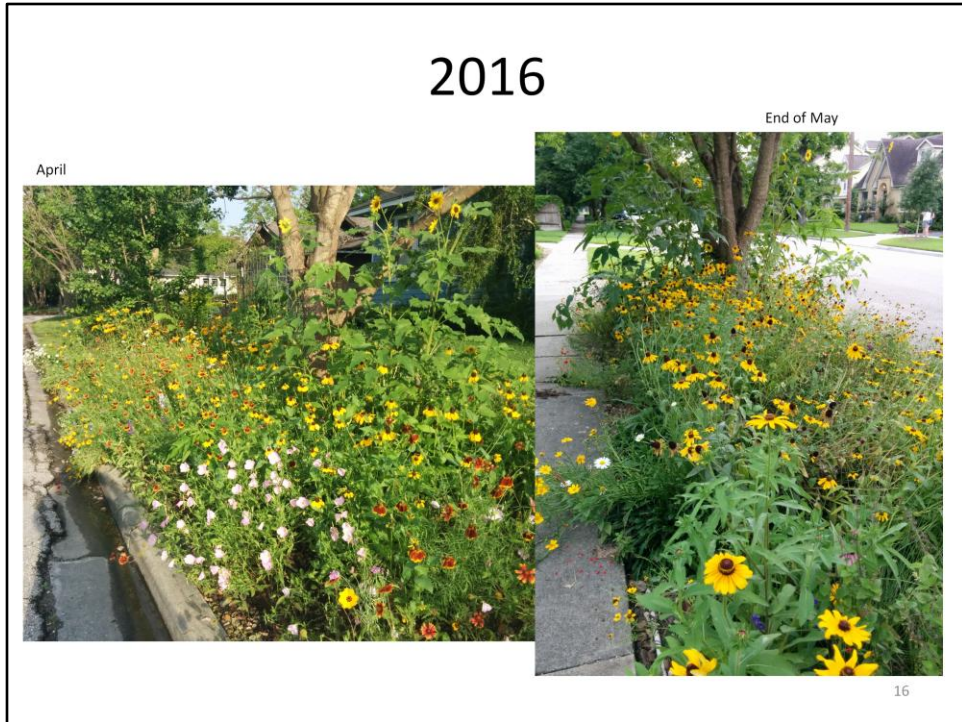
Mid-March 2016



15

This is looking the other way.

2016



This is what it looked like in April and the end of May when the tree has started to leaf out. You can see some sunflowers, unfortunately right under the tree. There is also some primrose, blanket flower, black-eyed susan, cutleaf daisy, claspig coneflower, and coreopsis. I'd often go outside and find parents posing their children in front of the flowers taking pictures.

End of June 2016



17

So now it is really shady so I'm not sure how shade tolerant the mix actually was. Things are really straining to find the sun. I pulled the dried up plants out shortly after this.

August 2016



18

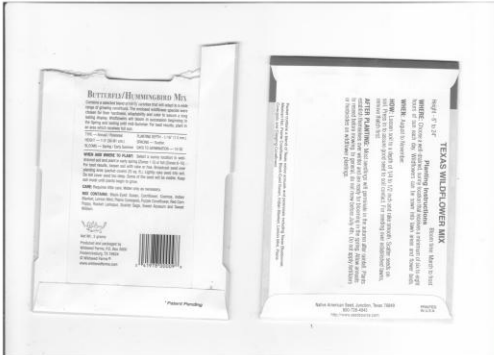
And this is how it looked in August. Again this area gets a little more sun. See the coneflower blooming? I have bought so many coneflower plants and had every single one of them slowly die. I planted them in good dirt which didn't seem to help. Here they are growing from seed in hard clay soil and are doing just fine.

Where to get seeds

Producing companies: Wildseed Farms and Native American Seed

Buy directly from supplier's websites. Buchanan's also carries their seed packets.

Can buy specific flower seeds or mixes allowing for a succession of color, mix of annuals and perennials.



Wildseed Farms
 425 Wildflower Hills / P.O. Box 3000
 Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
 (800) 848-0078

Texas/Oklahoma Wildflower Mix

Common Name	Botanical Name	% By Weight	Minimum % Germ
Texas Bluebonnet	Lupinus texensis	18.90	85
Indian Blanket	Gaillardia pulchella	8.00	50
Scarlet Flex	Linum rubrum	8.60	80
Tickseed	Coreopsis lanceolata	8.45	55
Lemon Mint	Monarda citrodora	8.23	80
Purple Coneflower	Echinacea purpurea	5.88	80
Drummond Phlox	Phlox drummondii	5.29	80
Comflower	Centaurea cyanus	4.40	80
Rocket Larkspur	Delphinium ajacis	4.40	80
Baby Blue Eyes	Nemophila insignis	4.40	70
Ox-Eyed Daisy	Chrysanthemum leucanthemum	4.18	85
California Poppy	Eschscholzia californica	3.14	80
Yellow Cosmos	Cosmos sulphureus	2.88	85
Baby's Breath	Gypsophila muralis	2.88	70
African Daisy	Dimorphotheca aurantiaca	2.75	55
Plains Coreopsis	Coreopsis tinctoria	2.24	85
Clasping Coneflower	Rudbeckia amplexicaulis	1.98	80
Black-Eyed Susan	Rudbeckia hirta	1.78	80
Tick Verbena	Verbena rigida	1.44	80
Corn Poppy	Papaver rhoeas	1.40	80
Toadflax	Linaria maroccana	1.21	85
Dwarf Red Coreopsis	Coreopsis tinctoria	1.10	85
Standing Cypress	Ipomopsis rubra	1.00	80
Showy Primrose	Oenothera speciosa	.77	80
Mexican Hat	Ratibida columnaris	.58	80
Indian Paintbrush	Castilleja		

34765
 TX/OK Wildflower Mix
 ¼ lb.
\$19.99

4 1978 334 13
 WWW.W

So let's get to the nuts and bolts of wildflower gardening. There are basically 2 companies that produce native seed: Wildseed Farms and Native American Seed. You can buy directly from supplier through their website, but often you can find their packets of seeds at your finer nurseries such as Buchanan's. You can get just single flowers such as bluebonnets or black-eye susans, or you can get a mix like I have here. Many types of flowers only bloom for 4-5 weeks, so by mixing flowers of various blooming times a long succession of flowering.

Soil Preparation



1. Select full sun site.
2. Pull up grass

Try to disturb the soil as little as possible as this brings up weed seeds.

If you have a large area, or have Bermuda or nut grass....

20

Soil preparation. First select a full sun site. OK, I already broke that rule. Planting under deciduous trees at least means that it will be sunny during the spring. The Chinese Pistache leaf out late- end of May, like a pecan. However, if your bed is in full sun, you can get blooms going all summer, too. The cone flower and rudbeckia, bloom all summer and some even will bloom until first frost, so full sun is best. Also make sure your site has good drainage. Wildflowers won't grow sitting in water for any length of time.

Step 2: Pull up the grass. If you are only doing a little area, clearing the ground by hand works OK. Try to disturb the soil as little as possible as this stirs up dormant weeds in the ground. That's pretty much it. Wildflowers thrive on pretty poor soil. A little compost probably won't hurt, but fertilizer will just get you a lot of leaves at the expense of blooms.



If you have a large area especially if it has Bermuda or nut grass, this will take time. The best way to kill grass in a large area—and this works for putting in just about any new flower bed—is this. I took this illustration from Pam Pennick’s new book ‘Lawn Gone’ that I just got last weekend. Dig out the edges of the area you want to do and cut the grass as close to the ground as you can mow. Leave all the trimmings. Spread a layer of compost and water well, then cover with cardboard, overlapping for solid coverage. We want to smother any existing vegetation. Wet the cardboard or weight it down temporarily to hold in place. Put down another layer of compost, or pile on leaves from your yard. Top it all off with a thick layer of mulch which keeps everything in place and looks a little tidier. Then wait 6 months. The cardboard and everything breaks down and you have a new bed with no weeds and nice fluffy soil.

When and How to Sow

Best time is in the fall from mid-September to mid-November.

Hand Broadcast seed at a rate of ~8-10 seeds/square foot.

Can mix seed with dry sand for spreading.

1 ounce covers ~135 square feet; ½ lb. covers 1000 square feet

Alternatively spread seed balls at about 1/square foot.

Mix 3parts clay powder, 5 parts peat-free compost, 1 part seed.

Add water slowly and mix until truffle-sized balls can be formed.

Let dry completely for 24 hours.



Scarify bluebonnet seeds before spreading.

Make sure there is good seed to ground contact. Do not bury seed.

Water (or not)

Wait for spring

22

The best time to plant the seeds is in the fall from mid-September to mid-November. Spring is too late! They need the cold of winter to set roots.

Some of the seeds are not going to germinate, so we want to spread more seeds than the plants will be spaced. IF you mix the seeds with dry sand it is a little easier to get even coverage as you can see the sand and the seeds are hard to see. I'm sure I end up putting in a lot more seeds than I need spreading them by hand.

Alternatively at one seed ball per square foot, it is little easier to judge how much seed you are putting out. Recipe for seed balls.

Scarify bluebonnet seeds before spreading. Bluebonnet seeds are tough so that they don't germinate all at once, so some will last if there is a bad year. So they need to be nicked or roughed up so increase their germination rate. The easiest way I've found is to roll them between 2 pieces of coarse sandpaper. This is called 'scarifying'. Make sure that there is good seed to soil contact, but the seeds shouldn't be buried. Just tamp the seeds into the ground. I usually just stomp on them with my shoes. Water (or not). Sometimes I water to help them get started, but mostly I just let nature decide. Wildflowers are used to roughing it.

That's it. Wait for spring. Maybe a little weeding, if you can tell what's a weed and what's a flower. When in doubt, leave it.

Collecting seeds

Let your wildflowers go to seed for next years crop before pulling up.

And/or pick seed pods before they open; let dry, remove seeds and store in a paper envelope in a cool dark place like your refrigerator (not freezer).

Spread collected seed in the fall.



Bluebonnet seed pods

23

If you let the wildflowers dry up and go to seed, some should come up on their own the next year, but I would always spread some new seed to make sure that I get good germination rates. You can collect seed if you want, that way you know just how much you got. Some seeds are easier than others. I usually collect bluebonnet seeds because they are big and easy. Just pick the seed pods before they open, let dry completely, remove the seeds, or sometimes they just pop out on their own. Store them in a paper envelope in a cool dark place like your refrigerator, but not the freezer. Then spread your seeds in the fall.

Why Grow Wildflowers

The Pretty (duh!)

Aid in the conservation of butterflies and bees

Excellent food source for them

Aids in pollination of other plants and flowers



24

So why grow Wildflowers? Well, they're drop dead pretty. Duh! But they also aid in the conservation of butterflies and bees. They're an excellent food source for these critters and they in turn aid in the pollination of the plants and flowers.

So there is still time to try a small patch of wildflowers in your yard. It just so happens we have some seed balls made up to share, if you would like to try few. Maybe you have some free space in an existing bed you could try them in, or maybe even an empty flower box. And who knows in a couple of years you may find yourself with chinch-bug or Virginia buttonweed plagued Saint Augustine lawn and decide that might be a good place to start a second meadow. Wildflowers seem to have this effect on people.