

Wildflower plant sale

Wildflowers should be a part of every landscape. They provide color and variety as well as nectar and larval food for many species of butterflies we have in our area. The all important bees are attracted to wildflowers too. There is a wildflower for almost any type of soil and microclimate from moist to dry and shade to full sun. After wildflowers are established, most of these plants will flourish from year to year with very little additional irrigation and fertilization.

Lynn Fabian, Okaloosa County Master Gardener, encourages the use of wildflowers in our Northwest Florida landscapes and shares with you an opportunity to purchase some of the same in today's article.

Wildflowers also provide food for hummingbirds and butterflies that migrate through our area. When plants are not available to feed these creatures, they can change their pattern of migration and are no longer seen. A friend who has lived in Okaloosa County over fifty years says that years ago you could not drive across Okaloosa Island without collecting a mass of Monarch butterflies on the car during their migration. Today, we feel fortunate to find a few of these beauties as they pass through the area. We can encourage the return of some species by making available the plants they need to live and reproduce.

Okaloosa County Master Gardener volunteers work with Larry Williams, Extension Horticulture Agent, to provide county residents with information about lawns, trees and other landscape plants. They help find solutions when homeowners find a landscape problem. To prepare for this work, Master Gardeners learn to identify landscape plants, diseases and pests that may occur in our area. Their training includes learning to propagate plants from seeds or from cuttings.

An additional challenge this year allowed Master Gardeners to propagate a wide variety of wildflowers, both perennials and annuals, and to grow them through the hot summer months. This year the results of the seed sprouting and plant divisions have filled the nursery to overflowing and these plants are being offered at a public sale.

The sale will take place at the Okaloosa County Extension Annex at 127 Hollywood Blvd NW in Fort Walton Beach on Saturday, October 15th from 8 a.m. until noon. This is an opportunity to acquire some wildflower varieties not often available. The plants are predominately Florida natives.

There will also be a plant clinic held concurrently with the plant sale. For more information, call (850) 689-5850 or (850) 651-7476.

A list of wildflowers that are native to the U.S. and specifically to North Florida can be found on the UF web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep061>; butterfly larval plants at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in564>.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, October 5, 2011