Fall is wildflower planting time in North Florida

Q. When is the time to plant wildflower seeds in North Florida? Is it better to choose native wildflower seeds? And, if so, where can the seeds be purchased?

A. Dara Dobson, UF/IFAS Master Gardener in Walton County and Florida Federation of Garden Clubs State Wildflower Chairman, provides the below answers to your wildflower questions.

For best results in North Florida, wildflower seeds can be planted as early as September but before January. New research from the University of Florida’s North Florida Research and Education Center in Quincy indicates seeds planted as early as September gives your seeds a chance to germinate during a period of greater rainfall. The seedlings will be frost tolerant and more mature by spring which will give you earlier blooms.

Mixing species by blooming periods can result in color from spring through first frost. Coreopsis basalis and Phlox drummondii are early spring bloomers, while Coreopsis lanceolata and Gaillardia pulchella generally start blooming in June. For mid to late summer color Rudbeckia hirta and Coreopsis leavenworthii are good choices. When you plant a mixed plot the stronger species will eventually choke out the others after a few years. Planting separate species in swaths next to each other will help the less aggressive species survive over a period of years.

When buying wildflower seeds your best choice is Florida grown Florida native ecotype seeds. These are seeds collected from wildflowers that came from native plant populations originating in Florida. Florida native ecotype seeds produce wildflowers that are more sustainable. They have no significant problems with disease or insect pests. Your second choice should be seeds of Florida native species that come from out of state suppliers. These are seeds of species that grow naturally in Florida. The parent plants were raised in other states and sometimes have slight genetic differences than our Florida grown plants. They are still a good choice over pre-mixed wildflower seeds commonly available that include species that do not thrive in our soils and climate.

Florida now has its own native wildflower industry. Florida grown Florida native ecotype wildflower seeds are available for sale to the public. This is a new and growing industry that in future years will provide the seeds needed to establish much more sustainable wildflower populations. Current seed availability is listed at www.floridawildflowers.com. The Florida Federation of Garden Clubs website (www.FFGC.org) has a “horticulture” section with a “wildflower” section devoted to native plants and wildflowers.

For additional wildflower information, including help choosing species for your specific garden/property or aid obtaining seeds, you may contact Dara Dobson via email at wildflowersmatter@defuniak.com or by phone at 850-859-0096.

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