

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

Plant Those Wild Flowers

October is the month to be planting wild flower seeds. If you haven't done it before because you think it's too much trouble, you're in for a surprise. There are basically only three steps...scratch the soil, scatter the seeds, and water. That's it! Mother Nature will do the rest.

Mind you, you won't see much this winter because the seeds will be germinating and putting on their "winter" growth. Some of the plants will be visible, others won't. Bluebonnets, for example, put out what's called a "rosette." It doesn't have any flowers and is only about 3-4 inches in diameter and grows low to the ground. But that's not what you plant bluebonnets for, now, is it. But just wait until spring. About February or March, they start their growth spurt and will shoot up to about 2-2.5 feet and start flowering. TADA. That's what I'm talking about. The same is true of lots of the other wild flowers that are so prolific in our area.

If you don't have your seeds yet, there are a couple of sources that I can recommend. The Shades of Green Nursery on Sunset in San Antonio has a good supply or you can order them on-line from Wildseedfarms.com on the internet. From Wildseed Farms, be sure to specify the Texas/Oklahoma mix.

When you get ready to plant them this month, take a bow rake (the hard metal) and scratch the soil up so that when you put the seeds out, they make contact with the soil. This soil-contact is the critical point. If they don't make contact with the soil, they won't germinate and/or sprout. Scatter the seeds out very widely; in other words, don't crowd the plants. You can rake them again if you like, but it's really not necessary as long as the seeds make contact with the soil. If you do rake them again, do it very lightly--you don't want to bury them so deep that they won't get enough sunshine to sprout.

Now water them just enough to get the soil wet under the seeds. That's about it. If it stays especially dry, you might water them again in about a week or so, but don't overdo it. Remember these are WILD flower seeds and they don't need much moisture at all--now or later. Too much water will drown them.

It's NOT time to fertilize the yard yet, but we're getting close. If you haven't bought your fertilizer yet, look for the word "winterizer" on the bag. That way, you'll know for sure that you got the right stuff. The numbers on the bag should indicate either a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio--like 15-5-10, or 21-7-14. The fertilizer is to be applied later this month. I'm just informing you now so that you can have it on hand when the time comes. For the organic gardeners, get your 9-1-1 or 6-2-2 pelletized fertilizer and you can go ahead and put it on now. You'll need to put down one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet; so do the math. For example, in a bag of 21-7-14, only 21 percent of that 40-pound bag is nitrogen. In a bag of 9-1-1, only 9 percent of the 40-pound bag is nitrogen, so it's gonna take about twice as much of the organic to get the same amount of nitrogen on the grass. The first step, of course, is to know how many square feet you have to fertilize. There's no way to know other than using a tape measure and walk through the yard. I hope you remember how to figure square feet from high school geometry. If you've forgotten, write me and I'll help.

Hey, if the leaves are falling off your trees, it's OK. Really! Why do you think the season is called "fall?" Duh.

The annual Herb Market will be held at Aggie Park (Loop 410 at West Avenue in San Antonio) on Saturday, October 15th. The event is sponsored by the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas and proceeds are used to finance their gardening-education programs. There will be lots of vendors and every kind of herb you ever heard of and then some.

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to gardener@gvtc.com.