

Treeways

2015 – 3

Native Wildflower Plantings

An excellent idea! Lots of great options, colors, species, sizes, grasses, flower types, bloom times, and leaf textures are available. Starting a native flower or meadow planting is a little more involved than planting a row of peas in the vegetable garden or growing geraniums in the patio pots during the summer. That being said, once you have made the effort and shepherded the native planting along for a while it will be largely self sustaining year to year unlike peas or geraniums that must be planted and pampered each and every year.

There will be extra care and watering the first year, there will be some weeding the second and third years and maybe nothing more than mowing in the fall in the years after that. You will get a greater abundance of butterflies and other native insects. You may even notice that you have more birds since our native birds during their nesting periods eat our native insects that need our native wildflowers for food. If you have done a good job choosing flower species you will likely have various flowers blooming all through the summer months. That means colorful butterflies and other interesting insects throughout the summer.

Like any new “flower bed” to get started some preparation is needed. Choose a site that is mostly sunny since the meadow type wildflowers prefer sunny locations. **Do not rototill the area** to prepare for your wildflower garden because that will greatly increase the weed problems during the first year. You could spray Roundup or a similar product to kill the existing vegetation and then mow the grass or “weeds” as low as your mower can be set.

Only buy selected native wildflower seed from a local seed company. The next step is to spread the seed and lightly rake it in. If you want to hurry the process along transplants or plugs establish faster but cost considerably more. Try to group wildflowers by type, color or height as you would in any other flowerbed to make it easier to do weeding and other care. The next step is lightly mulching and watering. Watering is key for the first year and perhaps a portion of the second year. The most likely cause of plant failure is watering – too much can be a problem but too little water will allow your baby wildflowers to dry up. Identifying weeds when growing wildflowers from seed can be difficult and there will be some weeding to do for at least the first two summers. You can expect some flowering the first summer, a good amount of flowers the second summer, and then third year the wildflower garden should really be glorious.

Check out the new wildflower planting near the corner of Windy Hill Road and Salem Church Road. The Parks and Public Lands Committee decided to do this demonstration wildflower planting to show how we can add wildflowers along our roadways and around our yard landscapes.

There is a great deal of information on line that you can access by Googling Minnesota wildflowers or the Blue Thumb website to check out plant selection guides. Your wildflowers will be good for you and for all of us. The butterflies, bees, bugs, and birds all thank you!

Local wildflower and prairie grass suppliers include these: Prairie Restorations, Prairie Moon Nursery, South Cedar Greenhouses, Glacial Ridge Growers, Landscape Alternatives, Bachmans, Gertens, and others.

Jim Naves
Sunfish Lake City Forester
612-803-9033
jim@lstrecare.com