



WILD FOR

Wildflowers can be a great addition to a landscape—the cottage look is just what many gardeners are seeking.

Additionally, when we hear wildflowers, we tend to think about flowers that are easy to grow, require little maintenance, and maybe even require less water than some of the other plants in the garden.

There are a few things to keep in mind when growing wildflowers.

Stratification, scarification

Some wildflowers require more than soil and water to grow; they require a treatment that simulates natural conditions. For example, penstemons are native Wyoming wildflowers that need their seeds to be stratified, or go through a cold treatment, for germination. Cold stratification requires more planning and forethought through the winter and early spring to have the seeds ready for planting on time. Please refer to this previous *Barnyards & Backyards* magazine article for more information on how to stratify seeds, “Some native wildflower seeds need cold stratification” at bit.ly/seed-stratification.

Scarification is another treatment some seeds require for successful germination, during which the seed coat is somehow weakened (for example, scratching, opening). Details about it will be available on the seed packet if a seed requires this kind of treatment.

Our state wildflower, Indian paintbrush, can be an especially difficult flower to cultivate. It is a partially parasitic plant that latches on to other plants’ roots for nutrients. Some species do fairly well germinating, but the success rate plummets after transplanting. Check out this article about Indian paintbrush to learn more bit.ly/indian-paintbrush.

Understand commercial seed mixes

The term “wildflower” implies flower species that have not been cultivated and are not hybrids; the flowers should not differ from their native flower counterparts. Wildflowers are not, and cannot be, native to everywhere.

Understanding the varieties in commercial seed mixes is important. Gardeners need to be intentional about what is planted and where it is planted. Just because a wildflower seed mix is purchased does not guarantee the species in the mix are native to Wyoming or the area they are being planted.

Most wildflower mixes have a list of the seeds enclosed. Before buying seeds, double-check that none of the seeds are problematic. This can be done by comparing the contents to the state and county noxious weed lists, or simply giving the local weed and pest office a call. Contact information for offices is at wyoweed.org, click on About Us, then District Offices. Lots of weeds in Wyoming served a previous life as ornamentals.

Being on weed watch

In addition to the noxious weeds list, there is *The Wyoming Weed Watchlist Field Guide* available at bit.ly/weed-watchlist. The watchlist builds awareness around weeds not yet present in Wyoming or present in low populations. This is a part of the state’s Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) program. The premise is it is much easier to eradicate one weed or a handful rather than pastures and rangelands full of weeds. Baby’s breath and oxeye daisy are several weeds that can be found in wildflower seed mixes. They are listed as potential problem weeds in this field guide. Although beautiful, these white flowers can cause some major problems for certain ecosystems, backyard gardens, and agricultural systems.

Wildflowers

Depending on the packet and mix, some seed labels also show a percentage of inert material. Inert material is essentially a mix of dirt, sand, stem pieces, broken seeds, and other miscellaneous materials. Some seed producers allow weeds to be in this inert material and some do not. So even if the seed content list looks to be problem-free, check for weeds in the inert material.

Keepers versus toss-worthies

Identifying the keepers from unwanted seedlings that simply sprouted up from having the soil watered can sometimes be difficult. Although not a fool-proof plan, prolific seedlings with purplish/green undersides are often weedy. The best plan is to let the seedlings grow to aid in identification, but if they are the “bad guys,” as we say in our household, pull them before they start to seed out. Otherwise, the cycle continues.

Wildflowers should never be introduced to “wild or natural” spaces such as on private, state, or federal land. They can be problematic in wildscapes for the same reasons they are in domestic landscapes. Oftentimes, weed populations flourish because they out-compete neighboring plants and don’t have natural

predators, such as insects, diseases, or wildlife. As previously mentioned, wildflowers are wild to some places but not all places. Sometimes it’s best not to alter the landscape; leave that to trained professionals who sometimes do plantings after wildfires, other disturbances, or to improve wildlife habitat.

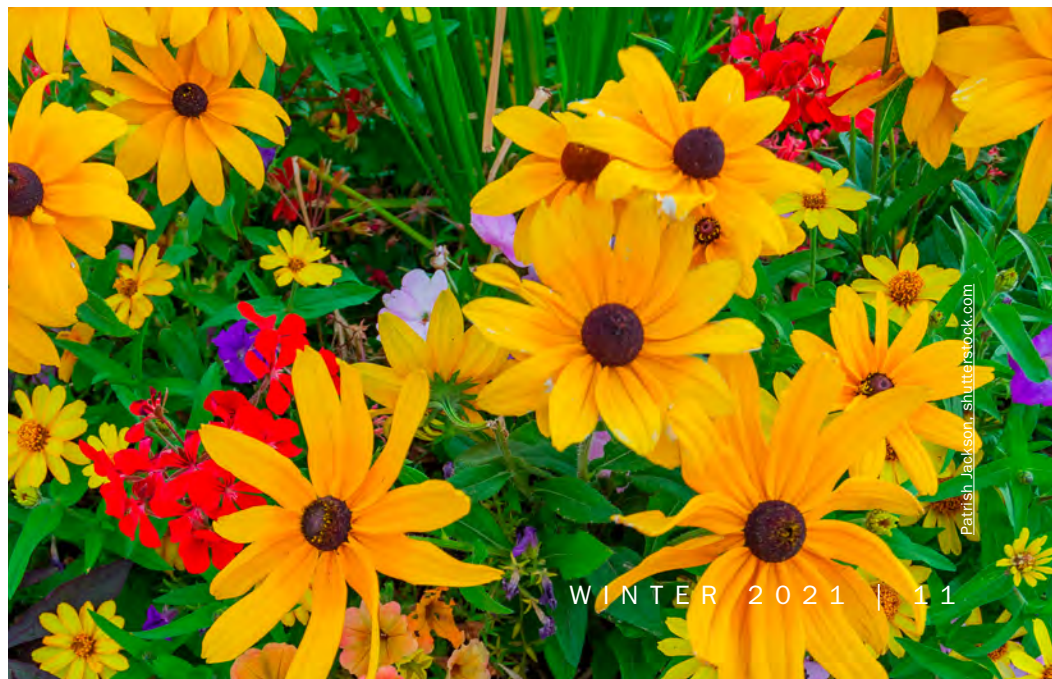
A final note

Although tempting to pick wildflowers while hiking and enjoying the outdoors, remember that some are rare plants right here in our forests, and we should do our part to support and protect them. Picking wildflowers can have devastating impacts on the wildflower populations, as well as the insects, birds, and wildlife that rely on them. Often,

flowers wilt right after picking. They could be enjoyed much longer if they were simply photographed. That being said, there are ways to legally collect wildflowers. You can contact a U.S. Forest Service office for more information.

“Wildflowers” give us much enjoyment, whether they are cultivated or in the wild. They are simple beauties, yet it’s good to know where they are best suited and why they’re there.

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We think **Abby Perry** just might stop to smell the flowers. She is a co-coordinator of this magazine and a University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Carbon County and serving southeast Wyoming. She can be reached at (307) 328-2642 or ajacks12@uwyo.edu.



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