

# TEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL SMALL WILDFLOWER SEEDING

## *Step 1*

**ANALYZE** your site. Determine soil type (sand, silt, clay, muck), drainage, moisture, slope, and amount of sunlight. Take a soil sample and test for pH and organic matter. Your County Cooperative Extension Service offers this testing service. Neither a tight wet clay soil nor a droughty, infertile subsoil is suitable for many wildflower species. It is recommended that seeding take place in Spring (mid-May or mid-June) or dormant seeding (mid-October thru November). Although seeding may be done at any time, you run the risk of losing newly germinated seedlings if either a hot, dry period or killing freeze occur before the seedlings are well established.

## *Step 2*

**SELECT** proper species for your site. Choose wildflower/grass species for a permanent planting that are perennial, native to Michigan, and grown as close to your area as possible for better adaptability. You may wish to buy some species separately for planting in colonies. An additional cover crop may be recommended, especially for sloped or bare soil sites. A cover crop also helps to suppress weed growth the first year during the slow germination period of perennials. You may also add a carrier such as a damp sand to add more bulk to your seed. **PLEASE REMEMBER IT TAKES 3-5 YEARS FOR PERENNIALS TO BECOME WELL ESTABLISHED.**

## *Step 3*

**HOW MUCH** seed do I need?

Area to be covered	Amount of Perennial Seed	Amount of Annual Cover Crop
1 acre	10 lbs. upland 6 lbs. wetland	20 lbs.
1,000 sq. feet	5 oz. upland 2.5 oz. wetland	8 oz.

## *Step 4*

**ELIMINATE** competitive vegetation such as quack grass, lawn sod, and persistent perennial weeds by spraying with herbicide or by tilling for one full growing season or by a combination of the two methods. Spray with Round-up® according to label directions. Wait two weeks and again spray areas not killed. **DO NOT NEGLECT THIS STEP** or the planting will have little chance of success. **A COMPLETE KILL IS VITAL.** Ideally, it is recommended that this process is repeated two or three times to assure elimination of each season's weeds.

### *Step 5*

**PREPARE SEEDBED** by raking, thatching, or burning so that about 50% of the soil surface is showing. Removing all dead vegetation is not necessary. Scarify (loosen or stir) soil surface with rake, thatcher or carefully controlled tiller to a depth of one inch. Do not turn up any more new soil, as this brings new weed seeds to the surface. Roll prior to seeding to firm the seedbed. Do not work soil further, but seed directly.

### *Step 6*

**SOW THE SEED** with a hand-cranked whirlwind seeder if available. Otherwise sow by hand using very small amounts. For larger projects, seed may be sown with mechanical seeders. Criss-cross the seedbed several times to spread the seeds evenly. Seed may be planted as a homogeneous mix or choose several species to seed separately. Sow the wildflower/grass mix over the entire plot. Plant the remaining single species in colonies or drifts. This approaches the natural state more closely, as most species tend to grow in colonies. This also gives greater visual impact. Interplant the species at the edges of the colonies to blur the boundaries and to avoid a “garden” effect.

### *Step 7*

**INCORPORATE SEEDS** by raking very lightly or going over the area with a thatcher. Some fine seeds such as penstemon and bergamot prefer no covering. A good rule is to cover no seed deeper than its own diameter. Bare, erosive soil should be *LIGHTLY* mulched with oat straw so that 50% of the soil still shows. Roll with lawn roller or tamp small area with rake or foot so seed will make good contact with soil. Erosion blankets are effective for holding seed in place on steep slopes.

### *Step 8*

**WATERING** is not necessary but will speed germination and establishment. However, once watering is begun soil must be kept moist continuously until the seedlings are well established.

### *Step 9*

**FIRST YEAR MANAGEMENT** is critical. Weeds will become the challenge the first year. We recommend following a mowing regime for at least one year post planting. Cut the planting to 4-6 inches whenever growth reaches 10-12 inches throughout the first growing season. A string trimmer works well on rough terrain or if mower cannot be set high enough. Plan to mow two to four times the first season. See Mowing Article in Native News Link for additional information.

### *Step 10*

**LONG TERM MANAGEMENT** of a planting would include pulling weeds, cutting or spot spraying with herbicide. If desired, the entire planting can be mowed in late fall or early spring. If the site allows, burning every three years in March or early April will help maintain a meadow planting. Do not burn the first two years, as tender seedlings may be damaged. Be sure to obtain a burning permit or contact a professional.

When established (3-5 years), wildflowers provide a relatively low-maintenance area with high aesthetic and environmental quality.