

Native Plants Can Save Time & Money

Native plants can save money, time and need for inputs.

All landscaping requires an investment and that includes landscaping with native wildflowers/grasses. I'm referring to native plant seeding compared to lawn seeding in this article. Over the long term compared to seeding a lawn, wildflowers can be a more sustainable and affordable option. A "well maintained lawn" typically requires frequent mowing, irrigation, fertilizer and weed control. How does wildflower seeding compare?

- Timely **MOWING** 3 times during the first and sometimes 2nd growing season can benefit a wildflower seeding projects as an efficient form of weed control. Beyond the 2nd growing season an early or late in the season one mowing will suffice. If possible, a prescribed burn could take the place of yearly mowing every 1-3 years. That's 3 mowings a season maximum during establishment and 1 mowing/season long term. How many times did you mow your lawn last season? Ours was mowed approximately 18-24 times in 2018.
- While **IRRIGATION** is required to keep a turf green especially during droughty periods, it is not available on 95%+ of our wildflower project sites . Although irrigation can accelerate the initial germination of some species, we typically prefer to work with conditions that nature provides and the seeds will germinate and establish under suitable conditions. Once established native species are hardy and drought tolerant.
- **FERTILIZER** is used frequently in lawn maintenance to assure a green and vigorous turf. To date we have never used a fertilizer on a wildflower seeding project and do not find it necessary since species are chosen according to the site conditions.
- Ongoing **WEED CONTROL** is needed to keep broad leaves out of turf grass and this is typically done with herbicide. Although weed control in a wildflower planting is critical too, especially during the 3 year establishment phase, as mentioned above mowing is the most efficient form of preventing weeds from reseeding. Some especially invasive species may require selective spot herbicide treatment and/or physical removal for control.

Thankfully there are more drought tolerant and slower growing lawn seed mixes available on the market and it seems that slowly but surely we are becoming more tolerant of an imperfect looking lawn. Lawns are certainly functional for framing a landscape, sport, recreation and picnic areas. Lawn can co-exist beautifully with a more natural landscape.

Undoubtedly the investment of time, money and inputs are highest for a wildflower seeding during the 3 year establishment phase. The cost of the seed can vary tremendously depending upon the composition of the seed mix. Cost for seed may be spread over time by starting with a small area and gradually expanding the seeding. Another option is to begin with a lower cost native grasses or basic matrix mix and enhance in the future with more diversity. Thorough site preparation and management are critical to the project and without commitment to this work success is unlikely. Long term management includes yearly mow or cyclical controlled burn and should include at minimum 1 site visit per season. Ideally visits throughout the season will assure that any concerns may be addressed sooner than later.

The initial investment in a native seeding project will be returned as the planting matures and becomes more sustainable along with a bonus of benefits including natural beauty, providing wildlife habitat, increasing soil health, capacity to store water and providing a sense of place.

