

Drought Tolerant Native Wildflowers By Ann Arshakuni

Here we are in the middle of another California drought. It's been a long, hot summer and many of us are already dreaming of fall, winter and spring. Now is a good time to start evaluating your yard, and native wildflowers are a wonderful addition to a landscape.

They are low maintenance, drought tolerant, and provide colorful beauty that blends in with the natural landscape in the Sierra Foothills. In addition, they provide biological diversity to our native ecosystems, which attracts birds and butterflies.

Some varieties may be purchased from your local garden center by individual species. Commercial wildflower seed mixes are available, but some are not native to the area, so it is wise to do your research to prevent an invitation to invasive non-natives.

Prepare the planting site by weeding, and rake or rototill the soil for a depth of an inch or two. Spread with the seed and cover lightly with soil or compost. This will allow smaller seeds to germinate. Gently pat down the soil.

Planting wildflowers in the same conditions that they grow in naturally is key. The seeds should be kept moist for 4 to 6 weeks to germinate. They are best if planted in the fall, in anticipation of some precipitation to help the process along. Come spring, the wildflowers will begin to bloom, along with other spring flowers in your landscape. Some supplemental watering may be needed if rainfall is limited due to ongoing drought conditions. But, once established, minimal additional water is needed.

A few of the native wildflowers of the Sierra Foothills include:

California Poppy *Eschscholzia californica*
Miniature Lupine, *Lupinus bicolor*
Blue Dicks, *Dichelostemma capitatum*
Farewell to Spring, *Clarkia amoena*
Five spot, *Nemophelia maculate*
Baby Blue Eyes, *Nemophila menziesii*
Chinese Houses, *Collinsia heterophylla*
Western Columbine, *Aquilegia formosa*
Coral Bells, *Heuchera*
Snowplant, *Sarcodes sanguinea*

The CA Native Plant Society (CNPS.org), The Stanislaus National Forest (fs.usda.gov) and Yosemite National Forest (nps.gov/yose) have great information regarding native wildflowers, and when and where to view them in our area. The next time you are taking a drive, stroll, or hike, you can stop and take a picture of a wildflower and determine what it is for the future if you are considering planting wildflowers. If you upload it to one of the plant identification applications, such as iNaturalist or Seek, you can determine what the plant name is, and if you are able to access seed commercially. Another way, is to type in your location in the app, and

the name, or part of the name of a particular plant you are interested in, to further research commercial availability.

Please keep in mind, there are consequences to poaching native wildflowers and their seed. They don't usually survive transplantation, and may upset the ecosystem by removing them. The good news is we are surrounded by native wildflowers and their beauty, and can just enjoy them in their natural setting, it doesn't get any better than that!

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UCCE Master Gardeners of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties can answer home gardening questions. Call 209-533-5912 or go to: <http://ucanr.edu/survey/survey.cfm?surveynumber=7269> to fill out our easy-to-use problem questionnaire. Check out our website at: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ You can also find us on Facebook.