

THIS FALL, GO WILD!

By Joan G. Hauser

The right wildflowers for the right location will do wonders for your garden. They'll proliferate and you'll barely have to lift a finger. The fall is the ideal time to create a wildflower garden. Cooler weather minimizes dehydration and encourages plants to establish a good root system before the first frost. (Our first potential frost date is October 20th.)



To prepare the soil, add a 50-50 mixture of soil and damp peat moss into the ground at a depth of 12 to 18 inches. Add compost yearly. Ferns, intermingled with other plants will maintain soil coolness and provide shade. Companion trees, such as hemlock, spruce, pine, fir, beech, oak, and birch will create acid humus, shade, and wind protection.

Make sure you purchase your plants or seeds. Plants stolen from the wild by you or commercial growers should not be used. All of the plants listed below may be purchased from nurseries and can be found on line. One nursery that I have used over the years is Eastern Plant Specialties at <http://www.easternplant.com/>.

You probably already have **lily of the valley** (*Convallaria majalis*), **violets** (*Violaceae*), and **blue-eyed grass** (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*) elsewhere in your garden that can be transplanted. I've listed only a few species to consider purchasing--some that prefer partial sun and others for more shaded areas.

Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) is a graceful plant with three-petalled flowers that blooms in May and June in partial shade or filtered sunlight. It will take 4 to 5 years for a plant to bloom from seed, but once established, it will multiply. See photograph on the left.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*), has become a very popular species with many varieties. The elegant brown and green-hooded plant blooms April through June and bears scarlet berries in August. (Unfortunately, the birds always eat my berries.) See photograph below.

Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), bears delicate white and pink petals on short stalks, flowering in April and May in moist, soil with filtered sunlight.

Virginia bluebells or **Virginia cowslips** (*Mertensia virginica*) are medium tall with pink buds turning to heavenly blue flowers in March and May. It flourishes in moist soil and partial shade.

Indian pink (*Spigella marilandica*) prefers moist soil and half to full day sun. The flowers are spectacular 1-2" long scarlet trumpets produced in early summer.

Rue anemone (*Anemonella thalictroides*) prefers moist soil and filtered sunlight. Small, short and fragile flowers in pink and white bloom March to May.

Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), grows in moist shaded areas. A clump of these 1 to 3 foot high plants are very attractive, producing small white bell shaped flowers that bloom from April to June. I prefer (*Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum'*) with its long-lasting white and green variegated leaves.

An alternative, if you have a sunny open space, is to create a meadow garden. It sounds like a cinch. Buy a packet of seeds, strew them over problem areas, and by magic, a unique garden will emerge. It's not so easy. Unlike the wildflowers mentioned above, a meadow garden can only grow in an area where grasses are the primary plant. Meadow gardens disappear as their site becomes wooded.

It's best to start in a small area. Till and smooth the bed, removing all existing weeds. Choose a mix that is suitable to your specific site and sow in the fall, keeping the seeds moist after sowing. Better yet, do a little research and create your own mixture with such native species as asters, goldenrod, chicory and black-eyed Susans. In the first few years, weeding will be essential. Choose only the seedlings you want to encourage. Cut the plants meadow-high with a scythe annually in the spring. After the seeds have matured, you may cut twice a year in the fall as well. Plants must be monitored lest one species "take over", destroying your initial concept of a lush, natural-looking meadow.



**START
A
WILD
GARDEN**



Virginia bluebells



Violet



Variegated Solomon's seal



Lily of the valley



Blue-eyed grass



Spring beauty



Rue anemone



Indian pink