Tips for Success

By Crystal Rose-Fricker

Wildflowers can be used to enhance the deep rough of golf courses and to add color to parks and other public facilities. They are also useful for soil erosion control, adding color to roadsides, and providing difficult to mow areas and for landscaping around structures.

When purchasing wildflowers, it is important to be aware of aggressive species which may take over your mixture and spread to unwanted areas. These species do well in difficult areas as they are quite vigorous, but in a mixture they can take over if used at a high percentage. Therefore Chicory, White Yarrow, Ox-eye daisy, Butter-n-Eggs, and Snow-in-Summer are some examples of species which should be used in small proportions in a wildflower mixture.

There are several different management schemes to choose from when growing wildflowers. A mixture of annual species can be planted and reseeded yearly to insure a broad range of colors and textures. After flowering is complete they can be mowed and Roundup can be used to control weeds before reseeding each spring.

Annuals and perennials can be used together, achieving color with the annuals flowering the first summer after a spring planting. Cold winter temperatures vernalize the perennials so they initiate flowers the following spring, a year after planting. Herbicides can be used prior to the initial planting. After the annual species die out the bare areas will be open to weed invasion, so they should be reseeded with more annuals each spring until the perennials take over.

When using annuals in mixes it is advantageous to use those which reseed themselves each year. A few examples are Bird's-Eyes, Farewell-to-Spring, Tiny Tips, Mountain Phlox, and Bachelor Buttons. Also, if you must plant in the fall, there are annuals which can survive during moderate winters, like those in Oregon. These would include Corn Poppy, Garland Chrysanthemums, Plains Coreopsis, Catchfly and others.

A third possibility would be to seed an all perennial mix in the spring or fall. If planted in the spring, only a few flowers will be evident until the winter temperatures vernalize the plants. At this time, herbicides can only be used before planting, followed by hand weeding for the life of the stand. Nonaggressive bunch grasses, such as sheeps fescue, can also be used in mixtures for soil stabilization to fill in areas where annuals die out. In our tests, 15 percent sheeps fescue proved to be a good mixture with plenty of flowers plus enough grass to fill in bare areas.

Seeding rate tests with our Bloomers Mix, a mixture of both annual and perennial wildflowers, revealed that 10 to 15 pounds per acre gave better coverage than five or 20 pound rates. Higher rates provided better competition against weeds and more color the summer after seeding as well as the following summer. Twenty pounds per acre was too high with the annual wildflowers crowding out the perennials so that the following summer more weeds encroached where the annuals died out.

A National Wildflower trial of 25 annual and 25 perennial wildflowers was initiated this spring to study the performance of some of the better producing wildflowers in many locations across the U.S. Seed was sent for trials in 50 locations to be planted this past spring or this fall. Data from the trials will be summarized and used to make recommendations for the use of wildflowers in various areas.