

George Christie's most successful wildflower seed planting technique

1. Buy high quality open-pollinated from a reputable source
 - a. **eco59.com** Seeds sourced from nearby Connecticut. Small Selection.
 - b. **WildSeedProject.net** Seeds sourced from Maine area. Modest Selection.
 - c. **PrairieMoon.com** Seeds sourced mostly from Midwest. Extensive Selection.
2. The MAIN DIFFERENCE is this—plant your seeds AFTER Thanksgiving for NEXT year, not in the spring for the same year.
3. Use a good quality potting soil. I don't think you need the moist-control stuff but I have had better growth with ones that include a fertilizer. The gold standard is an organic seed planting mix made without peat moss, but you may not be able to find/afford such a thing—don't sweat it.
3. I find 3 to 4" pots are big enough to get started but small enough you can plant a lot of them even if you only have a small area. Sometimes you can get used pots from your local garden center—give them a good wash and you're good to go.
4. Plant the seeds according to the instruction on the packet. IGNORE any special instructions beyond seed depth. I do like to cover them with a bit of sand. The easiest way to do that is to save an herb jar with a shaker insert. Fill it with dry sand (I recommend using at the basil first, but it's your call) and shake it over the pots like Parmesan on spaghetti. An eighth-inch will do. This will reduce the impact of rain drops on the soil and seeds. Why ignore other instructions? Because most of them have to do with prepping the seed for germination. By planting your seeds after Thanksgiving, Mother Nature will take care of all those issues over the winter! Cold stratification? It's called January. Scarification? It's called February. Remember, in the wild these seeds just sit around all winter without a lick of help from people.
5. You can water if you want but there's no need to. Just place your trays in a shady area but open to rain fall. Now for the most important step of all--cover then with some sort of screening. I use old window screens I kept when we replaced our windows. These screens do two things—first and foremost, they keep the darn squirrels and chippies out of the pots! Secondly, the screen breaks up rain as it falls and prevents heavy rain from seriously disturbing the sand and soil below. I put a few rocks on top of the screens (the squirrels around my place lift weights in the off-season) and then I forget them until March.
6. In March start paying attention and treat like any other seed/seedling. I move my pots into sunnier locations as the seedlings start to emerge. My goal is three to five seedlings in each pot. In the wild plant typically grow close together and having more than one in each pot will help with genetic diversity later on. If you've used a 3 or 4" pot, you can usually plant the plant directly into your garden. Smaller pots may need to be planted up into a larger pot before placing in the garden. It's up to you—smaller plants can start to adapt to their new home more quickly, but they're more susceptible to rabbit and rain damage. Sometimes it boils down to it's easier to water them while they're still in the pots.

7. And that's it—the key difference between most wildflowers (annuals can be planted in spring) and your veggie garden is the wildflower seeds do best when exposed to winter temperatures and precipitation. Also, please cover the pots—the small animals will destroy them if you don't.