

# HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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## SELF-SOWING PERENNIALS OFFER MORE FOR LESS

As I have thought about the condition of my landscape recently, I've had the thought—"why can't my landscape just grow itself?" Well obviously this isn't possible, but for those who need to start with less and end up with more, some self-sowing plants may be the answer.

Plants that can self-sow offer a unique way for a penny pincher to fill in some of those bare spots in the landscape that may occur from time to time.

Plants that can reproduce themselves by self-sowing or vegetative means fall into many categories and need to be evaluated based on the needs for the specific space. In some cases self sowing plants can become a complete nuisance and invade other areas of the landscape. In other cases certain plants may cross pollinate and leave you with variations of the original. Despite these possible issues, there are still plenty of obvious good reasons to plant self-sowing plants.

In most cases it will take trial and error and some experimentation to discover which self-sowing plants are the best fit for any specific landscape, but this is what keeps us gardeners thrilled about what we do!

When working with self-sowing plants here are a few tips:

Fall or spring can be a good time to plant seeds of self-sowing perennial species. In the life cycle of most perennial plants fall is normally the time when seeds are dropped and then left to find their place in the soil before germinating for the next season anyway. Some seeds actually require a cold period before germination, so this is another reason a mid to late fall planting before the first frost is effective for many species.

Spring is also a good time to germinate seeds and then transplant outdoors for those who would rather start the plants inside.

Give self-sowing plants a little space to allow for spreading. You may actually need to divide and thin plants out over time since some have the ability to take over small spaces.

When planting different species together, match their cultural requirements: needs for water, sun, and soil needs should be similar.

If you start from seed it may be a good idea to plant some seeds of your mix in a separate pot so you can recognize the seedlings that come up and be able to identify them in your garden. It would be a shame to mistake them for weeds and pull them up.

Self-sowing plants work best for gardeners who prefer naturalistic landscapes. If you are a neat and tidy gardener, the random and unpredictable nature of this approach may not suit your style.

### What Plants to Try

There are many plants that can self-sow, and here are a few that you may be interested in trying in your own landscape.

Echinacea purpurea (Purple Coneflower), Rudbeckia hirta (Black-eyed Susan), Rudbeckia triloba (Brown-eyed Susan), Aquilegia spp.(Columbine), Agastache (Hummingbird Mints), Asclepias tuberosa (Butterfly Weed), Baptisia australis (Blue False Indigo), Centaurea montana (Perennial Bachelor's Button), Callirhoe involucrata (Purple Poppy Mallow), Campanula spp.( Bellflower), Brunnera macrophylla (Siberian forget-me-not), Centranthus ruber (Jupiter's Beard), Lobelia cardinalis (Cardinal Flower), Platycodon grandiflorus (Balloon Flower), Campanula lactiflora (Milky Bellflower), Gaillardia (Blanket Flower), Coreopsis (Tickseed).