

## **Planting Instructions**

Thank you for your interest in planting native seeds. The plants you grow will help build habitat and support our local pollinators. For the best chance of success with your native seed packet, please follow the instructions laid out below.

### **Site Preparation**

Properly preparing your site is one of the most important steps in order to have the best chance of success with your seed packet. The goal is to clear out as many weeds and non-desirable plants as possible to give your seeds the best chance of success. If you are planting into an existing garden bed, simply pull any weeds in the area you plan to plant and skip ahead to the “Putting Down Seed” section below.

If you are planting into a new garden bed or existing turf grass, you will need to do more preparation. Start by mowing down existing vegetation in the area you want to plant and lay down a thick layer of newspaper or cardboard. For the cardboard, don't forget to peel off tape and any other plastic material. Then add 3-6 inches of wood chips on top of the newspaper or cardboard. Once this is in place, you will want to wait 6-12 months to allow the cardboard and wood chips to begin breaking down. This method suppresses any weeds from growing in the area while adding nutrients back over time by allowing the cardboard and wood chips to break down.

Other methods include solarization, mechanical removal, and the use of herbicides to remove vegetation and prepare an area for seeding. The most important thing is that you remove the existing vegetation while disturbing the soil as little as possible to give your seeds the best chance of success in your landscape.

### **Putting Down the Seed**

Once your site is prepped, it's time to put the seed down. With this step, timing is everything. We recommend putting your seeds down in fall or early winter for the best chance of success. This allows the seed to undergo winter stratification, which is a process most native seeds require before they will begin to germinate and grow in your garden. For the best chance of success, mix your seed packet with sand, sawdust, or potting mix and scatter the seed across the area you wish to plant. Following this, use a rake to mix the seed into the top layer of the soil, only about ¼ inch deep. Finally, walk across the area a few times to push the seed into the soil. You can cover the area with straw or a light layer of leaf mulch but be careful not to bury the seeds too deep. Finally, lightly water the area as this will push the seed further into the soil and give it the best chance of survival. You can sow seeds any time of year, just be aware that many species may not germinate until the following spring.

### **Long Term Maintenance**

Establishing a native garden using seeds is cost effective, but it requires patience. Many species will be slow to get started the first couple of seasons and may not begin blooming until their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Over time these landscapes are easier to maintain, but that does not mean they are maintenance free. As your garden is getting started you will want to watch out for aggressive weeds or invasive plants and pull them out to prevent them from taking over. One method to do this is mowing the area to a height of 6-8 inches during the first season. This prevents aggressive annuals from going to seed and ensures light can reach the smaller seedlings during their first growing season. Targeted weeding or spot spraying can also be effective however this requires familiarizing yourself with native plants at various life stages. A useful skill, but one that can take some time to develop.

In addition to weed management, occasional watering can be helpful during the first 2 seasons as the plants are getting established. This is only necessary

during longer dry spells, but more regular watering can help speed up the establishment of the native seedlings. Over time different flowers or grasses may do better than others. This is a natural process based on your site conditions and which species are happiest in your landscape.

For additional information and guidance please check out [greatparks.org](http://greatparks.org) for upcoming educational programs and volunteer events being held at Shaker Trace Nursery.