



Wildflower Week will be here soon. What exactly is Wildflower Week and what is a wildflower? You might be surprised to find out that some of your favorite perennial flowers are actually considered wildflowers.

Nebraska Wildflower Weeks' focus is on embracing wildflowers and native plants of Nebraska. Nebraska Wildflower Week will be observed June 5-11, 2023, when Nebraska's prairies and gardens are typically at their prime. The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA) coordinates Wildflower Week activities bringing together a list of entities that know the true value of wildflowers. Wildflower Week events are planned across the state June 5-11. View the Nebraska Wildflower Week events statewide and resources here:

<https://plantnebraska.org/wildflower-week>.

Wildflowers and native plants are very versatile plants that have multiple benefits in the landscape. Some wildflowers are a cut above the rest and are worth a try in your garden. These plants can be unique and interesting additions to the landscape. What is the difference between native plants and wildflowers? The terms "native" and "wildflower" are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Native plants in the Great Plains are generally described as those found growing in a defined area prior to European settlers. Wildflowers are described as flowering plants that grow with little or no human help. They can either be native or introduced or brought in from other areas. Both wildflowers and native plants work well in low maintenance areas and in sites that need hardy, drought tolerant plants.

"One of the beautiful things about wildflowers is that they can be discovered and enjoyed right in our own neighborhoods and communities – alongside roads, paths and trails; in meadows and parks; in wooded areas and in open prairie," said Bob Henrickson, NSA's horticulture program coordinator.

"Their natural resilience and their ability to thrive even in the toughest environments makes them accessible to just about everyone, if we are willing to open our eyes and notice them."

Top 5 wildflower picks of 2023:

Butterfly Milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*-This 2-3 foot tall perennial is a favorite of butterflies with its orange to orangish-red flowers that bloom June through August. As with all milkweeds, the flowers are followed by interesting seed pods filled with fluffy-topped seeds.

Aster, *Aster* species- Plants within this species are another favorite of butterflies. These perennials produce 3-5 foot tall rounded mounds of color that range from pink, to rose, to deep blue to white. They are a great way to add striking color in the summer and fall months.

Coreopsis or Tickseed, *Coreopsis* species- These perennials are not only tough-as-nails, but they also have an added bonus of being a great cut flower. These 1-3 foot tall plants are covered with yellow, orange, or reddish colored flowers that bloom June through September.

Dotted Gayfeather, *Liatris punctata*- These plants produce 1-2 foot tall purple spikes of color in the landscape in August through September. These flowers also make a long-lasting cut flower.

Prairie Petunia, *Ruellia humilis*-It might not be easily found in the nursery trade, but when you find it, it is worth a try. The prairie petunia is a short 1-2 foot tall plant that easily seeds itself in the landscape. It produces blue to violet petunia-like flowers June through August. It can look a little tough later in the season, but it is worth a try in the right area.

This is just a sample of my favorites, but there are many more interesting wildflowers to learn about. More information about wildflowers can be found in a UNL Extension NebGuide, a University publication, 'Wildflowers for the Home Landscape'. Go to <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu> and search for the keyword 'wildflowers'.

Elizabeth Exstrom is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu, her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.