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# 15 Types of Wildflowers to Plant in Your Garden

Grow them in their native ranges, and beautiful pollinators will come in droves.

By [Olivia Young](#) July 11, 2022



You know all the tricks to [boost biodiversity in your garden](#): You plant bright and fragrant flowers for pollinators, you put water out for parched animal neighbors, and you keep your soil nourished with compost teeming with delicious microorganisms. Yet you might still be overlooking perhaps the most impactful garden feature of all: wildflowers.

Contrary to what you may be thinking—that wildflowers are flowers that grow in the wild, obviously—the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, defines them simply as "native to where they grow." With the rising number of invasive species chewing away at our natural-born ecosystem, the flowers you're currently seeing in the wild might not even be true wildflowers, by this definition.

## Why Plant Wildflowers?

The NRCS urges gardeners to use their space to replenish the plants lost to invasive species and development. It lists the benefits of growing wildflowers in your garden as providing critical wildlife habitat, improving water quality, preventing soil erosion, improving soil conditions, and creating a bountiful food source (not just in the flowers themselves but also in the insects they attract). As for the gardeners, they'll also be rewarded—with a beautiful, disease-resistant, pest-tolerant, and water-efficient bouquet of color. Best of all, you'll be blown away by how little effort is involved.

Use the National Wildlife Federation's [Native Plant Finder](#) to find flowers native to your exact location. Here are 15 wildflowers native to various locales throughout the U.S., all primed for a spot in your garden.

### Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)



Monarch butterflies are in trouble. A 2022 release from the Department of the Interior said western overwintering populations have declined by 95% since the '80s.<sup>2</sup> This wildflower, common in prairies and grasslands all the way from the northeast to the southwest, serves as a host plant to monarchs. This means that

butterflies rely on their namesake "weed" to raise their young.

Butterfly weed blooms are a bright orange-yellow—hence the insects' attraction—though it can take three years for flowers to appear. In addition to butterflies, it also attracts [hummingbirds](#) and [bees](#).

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Partial to full sun (but blooms more profusely in full sun).
- Soil Needs:** Dry, well-draining, slightly acidic to neutral.

## Indian Blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*)



Indian blanket adds a pop of bright red-orange bordered by chipper yellow to gardens throughout the southern and central U.S. This coloring gives it the alternative name "firewheel." This is a hardy plant that thrives in tough prairies, rocky plains, and even droughty conditions. Birds eat the seed heads while bees and butterflies go nuts for the nectar.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 2 to 11.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Slightly acidic, well-draining.

## Red Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)



Red columbine is a buttercup, unique in its downward-pointing red and yellow flowers. The blooms appear to be bowing their heads. Their tubular shape caters to the swordlike beak of the hummingbird.

Also known as wild honeysuckle, this flower is perfect for adding brightness to a partly shaded part of your garden during the spring blooming season.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 8.

- Sun Exposure:** Partial to full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Sandy, loamy, moist, well-draining.

## Black-Eyed Susan (*Ruudbeckia hirta*)



Black-eyed Susans are seen as the quintessential wildflower in the eastern half of the U.S. They look very similar to a sunflower, with their yellow petals and black centers, but they're much smaller (reaching up to 36 inches) and not actually related to their big-headed doppelgangers. The cheerful yellow flowers keep the garden looking lively in late summer and into the fall.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Almost any, clay or loamy, as long as it's moist and well-draining.

## New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)



Ranging from light lavender-pink to deep purple with a perfectly contrasting yellow center, New England asters—like black-eyed Susans—are known and appreciated for their late-season bloom period. Beware, though, these dainty little blossoms aren't actually so dainty at full size; they can grow to six feet tall.

The New England aster is beloved by monarchs. Plant it in your garden if you live in the Northeast or northern swath of the Midwest.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 4 to 8.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Grows best in organically rich soil but can tolerate clay.

## California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)



California is lucky to call this poppy its state flower. Its orange and yellow cuplike blooms are some of the first to pop open, sometimes as early as February in especially warm climates. Despite [California's apparent proprietorship of the plant](#), it has quite a wide range—growing up and down the Pacific coastline and spanning the Great Basin, stretching north to southern Washington and east to Utah.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 8 to 10.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Sandy, rocky, very fast-draining.

## Blue Flax (*Linum lewisii*)



An explosion of delicate sky-blue flowers on leggy, wiry stems, blue flax is native to the entire western swath of North America, from the Mexican border to Alaska. It grows up to two feet tall and can have a bushy, unkempt appearance. Because of this and its tendency to spread, it's a great ground cover option for open meadows and hillsides. The satiny flowers last from late spring to mid-summer but require full sun to open.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 5 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Poor and barren sand, clay, or rocky soil.

## Purple Coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)



For blooms that last through to late summer when others have stopped flowering, gardeners in the eastern U.S. may consider the native purple coneflower, a purple to pinkish-purple daisylike flower that grows on a long, sturdy stalk. These wildflowers not only bloom for a long time, they also bloom again in the fall.

This is a hardy and adaptable flower, able to thrive in droughty conditions and a range of temperatures.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Sandy to clay, very well-draining.

## Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)



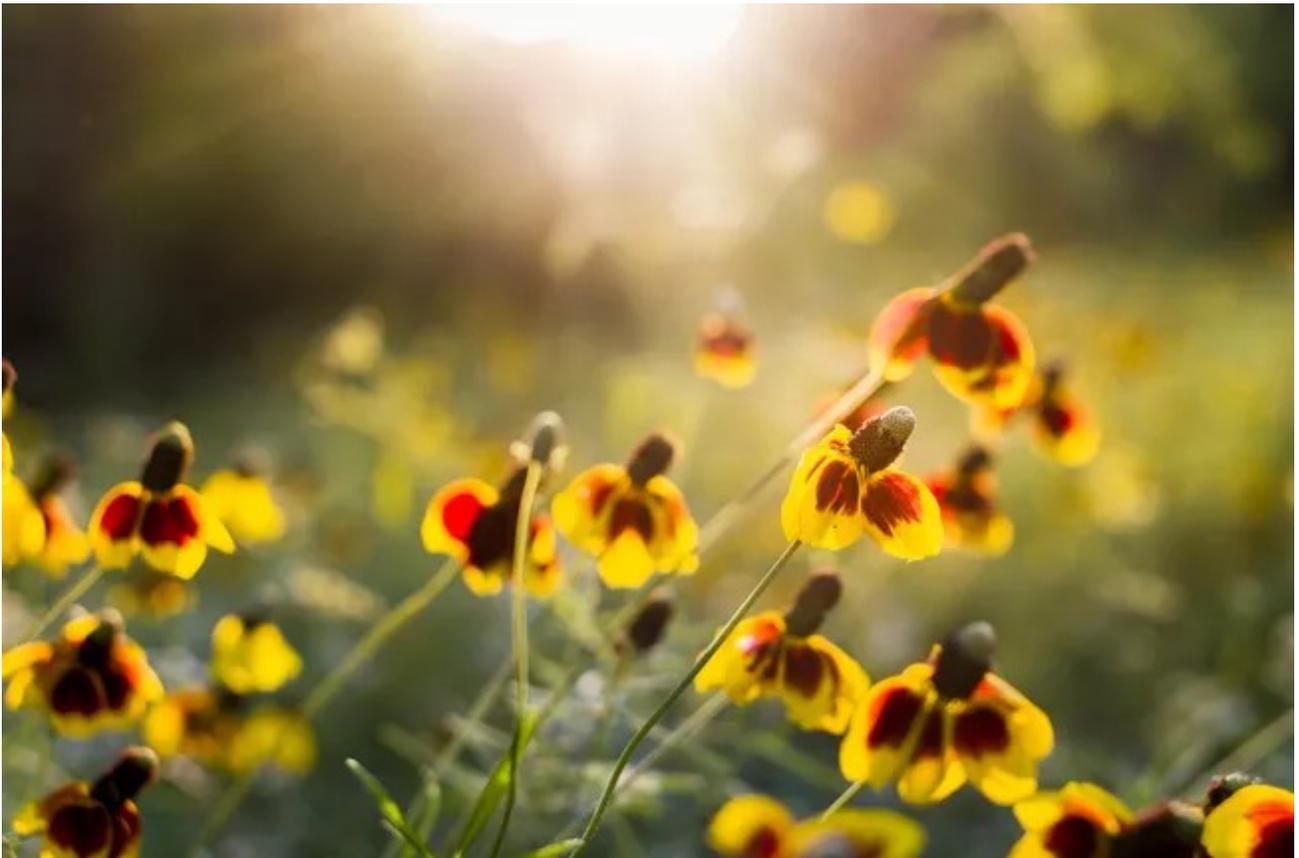
You might know this wildflower from its popularity as a skincare oil. You might even want to make your own with evening primrose in your garden. It grows throughout the Midwest and into the South, opening its lovely yellow flowers only after the sun goes down between May and July.

That's right: Evening primrose is a [night bloomer](#). Its refreshing lemony scent, however, can be enjoyed any time of day.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Rich, well-draining.

## Mexican Hat (*Ratibida columnifera*)



Called so because it's shaped like a sombrero, the Mexican hat flower—also known as upright prairie coneflower—is a great conversation starter for the garden. Blooming from mid-summer to fall, this wildflower is one that Middle America can call its own. Its range spans from the tippy top of North Dakota to the lowest part of Texas and everywhere between.

While the flower does attract a bounty of pollinators, its foliage lets off an odor that repels deer.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Dry, well-draining.

## Wild Lupine (*Lupinus perennis*)



Want to grow a plant that thrives in the Arctic? Wild lupine loves poor-quality soil and, therefore, thrives on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. It emerges from prairies and dunes along the U.S. East Coast, too, even found as far south as Florida.

There are hundreds of species of lupine, and most can be identified by their tower-like stalks covered in pea-sized flowers. Wild lupine is no different. It can be either blue or two-toned blue and purple, flowering late in the spring.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full to partial sun.
- Soil Needs:** Sandy, moist, acidic, well-draining.

## Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*)



Anywhere east of the Mississippi you could spot the common blue violet, a flower beloved for its showy periwinkle blooms and culinary uses. (Pro tip: Throw a few of these flower heads into a summer salad to impress guests.)

The common blue violet is hardy and prolific—so much so that it's often considered a weed. For this reason, it makes a virtually maintenance-free ground cover.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full to partial sun.
- Soil Needs:** Moist, humus-rich, well-draining.

## Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)



Yarrow is one of the more widespread wildflower varieties, growing just about everywhere in the U.S. (including Hawaii and Alaska) except maybe the extreme south of Florida and Texas. Wild yarrow produces tiny white flowers in flat or domed clusters from April to October. The plant smells distinctly of pine needles mixed with chamomile.

Yarrow looks best when it grows dense and bushy, not leggy. This is best achieved with full sun.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 3 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Loamy, well-draining.

## Scarlet Bee Balm (Monarda didyma)



Scarlet bee balm is the wow factor of any garden, with its tufts of tubular crimson petals. It's nickname? Fireball, aptly. This showstopper is a member of the mint family, so expect it to smell (good) and to spread. It blooms mid-summer and grows from New York to Michigan south to Georgia.

The one thing to remember when planting scarlet bee balm in your garden is to keep the soil moist.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 4 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full sun.
- Soil Needs:** Moist, rich, fertile, well-draining.

## Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)



While most wildflowers attract a fair share of pollinators, the cardinal flower is quite famous for its ability to bring in throngs of butterflies and hummingbirds. These nectar-seekers are no doubt attracted to the brilliant red of its petals, rising in spikes on leggy stems. They also rely on it as a food source late in the summer, after other plants have stopped producing. The bright hue of the cardinal flower is a great way to incorporate fall color.

Native to marshes and stream banks, this plant thrives in moist soil rich in organic matter and struggles in dry conditions.

**USDA Growing Zones:** 2 to 9.

- Sun Exposure:** Full to partial sun.
- Soil Needs:** Rich, moist, well-draining.