There is a beautiful flower garden this spring in front of the University of Florida IFAS Extension office for Leon County. There are brilliant California poppies, sweet peas, larkspurs, and bachelor buttons. Surprisingly, the plants providing all the color were purchased for just a few dollars. That's because they were all seeded last November from just a few small packets of flower seeds.

It is amazing what can happen from a few packets of seeds. But then that's one of the wonderful things about gardening. Gardening reminds us the value of planning and investing for the future. It teaches us of the importance of doing the right thing at the right time and then sitting back and being patient.

If we do our homework and plan, then plant the right plants in the right location at the right time, and provide water when it is needed, nature does most of the rest. That's what Master Gardeners Anne Tofield and Marcia Taliaferro did last fall. They pulled back the mulch in a few areas of the demonstration gardens the Master Gardener volunteers maintain at the Extension office. The ground was already relatively soft because of the mulch which has been in place several years. So preparing the soil for planting was relatively easy. Then, following the directions on the seed packets as to planting depth, they sowed the tiny seed.

The demonstration gardens have an inexpensive low-volume irrigation system which connects to the water faucet like a regular garden hose. It is really little more than a flexible hose snaked through the beds with micro-irrigation heads attached to the hose at appropriate points. You can install such a small system, with parts available from many garden centers, in a matter of an hour or so. But the system made watering the newly seeded areas, every couple of days, a relatively easy procedure. The seed bed needed to be kept moist until the seedlings were up and an inch or so tall. This took a few weeks to a month.

Through the winter, the plantings were only watered whenever nature didn't provide rain every week or so. The seedlings remained relatively small until late February or early March when they started growing rapidly. By April, the show of color had started.

Anne and Marcia were a little surprised at their success. Their success easily overshadowed the failure they had with some of the seed. For example, the Iceland poppy seeds they planted, for some reason, didn't fare as well. They only had a few of the Iceland poppies to survive and...
You will probably see a few other seeded flower gardens in bloom around town now. But don't think you can go out and duplicate the same thing in your yard. At least not now. You have to wait until next November. Then sow your own seed.

The bachelor buttons, poppies, sweet peas, and larkspur all needed full sun. It is very important that your planting area really has full sun. Otherwise you won't be as successful as were Anne and Marcia. Equally important, you need to plant in an area that's not subject to washing out with heavy rains and that is not poorly drained. Then you have to be patient enough to supply the irrigation at the critical times. And patient enough to just wait. If you do these things, you can be richly rewarded from seeding flowers.

If you want to give seeding a try before next fall, visit your local garden center now. But you must select the right kinds of seed. Some easy-to-grow seed for this time of year are cleome, cosmos, nasturtium, and zinnia. Gomphrena, or globe amaranth, isn't too difficult either. But, be forewarned that weed control is a lot more difficult with spring- or summer-seeded flowers than with fall seeded ones. Also, be aware, too, that most of the wildflower seed mixes you can buy should not be planted until the fall.

And if first you don't succeed with seed, try again. If you put the right seed in the right location at the right time, apply a little water at the right times, it's amazing what can happen. Just ask Anne and Marcia.

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