

Plant Seeds Now to Enjoy a Spring Cottage Garden



Photo by Texas A&M University : Bachelor buttons are among the winter annuals that can be seeded now for spectacular color in the spring.

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Whether you are a gardener or not, your mind is probably not on your spring garden right now--you have way too many activities filling your fall and holiday calendar. But you could use a nature break to keep you healthy during this time, and why not surprise yourself and those around you with the 'makings' of a spring cottage garden?! The 'makings' are seeds of early spring annuals; the labor required to plant them is minimal, and the delayed results can be stunning. This fall seed planting gives the plants several winter months in which to develop hardy root systems to support strong stems and magnificent blooms in the spring.

What can you plant? Easiest and most successful in our area are larkspur, bachelor's button, sweet peas, sweet alyssum, California and other poppies, and even hollyhock and foxglove. Also candytuft, stock, nigella and nasturtium will grow from fall planted seed. If you dream of a field of wildflowers, now is the time to scatter them over the soil, individually or using prepared mixes.

Here's how: Pick some specific locations in your yard or garden that are sunny, well drained and not in any pathway of running water. Clear away all weeds. You may want to add some aged compost like dried cow manure or some timed release fertilizer pellets.

Now loosen the soil with a hoe or rake--you do not have to dig very deep for this project. Then--as you would in cooking--set aside enough of the soil to sprinkle over the top of the planted seeds. Rake the remaining soil so it is smooth, but do not pack it down in any way. You are ready to plant.

Lightly distribute the seed onto the soil. Then lightly sprinkle some of your set aside soil over the seeds to achieve the recommended depth on the seed packet. Then lightly (once again) pat the soil or tamp it down so that the seeds are in good contact with the earth. The following step is my own personal addition: Very lightly sprinkle some clean pine straw over the seed area to add some protection from wind and water and falling

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leaves. You should be able to see most of the soil through the confetti of pine straw.

Next it's time for aftercare. This begins with watering. Let rain or your own sprinkling efforts keep the seed bed moist until the seeds have germinated and are at least an inch tall. This will require up to a month. Then water as needed by observing the plants, or once a week if it does not rain. The seedlings will remain small until early spring when rapid growth will commence.

Thin the seedlings after they are established, approximately two months from time of seeding. This process is often hard on a gardener's heart, but remember the soil can support only so many healthy blooming plants, so do everyone the favor of giving each plant at least a few inches of its own space in which to breath and grow. Large plants may need up to twelve inches between plants.

Showtime will be April! Enjoy!

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