

BEST PRACTICES



Wildflower Seed Packets: Friend or Foe?

Wildflowers have the reputation for being low maintenance, water wise, colorful and providing habitat for bees and butterflies. Over the years, wildflower seed mixes have been used to beautify roads, highways and yards. They're cheap and you can buy them on the shelves of local nurseries and hardware stores, but are they beneficial or do they cause other concerns?

A University of Washington study determined that wildflower seed packets mostly contained fast growing nonnative invasive plants or non-friendly plants. You can find the study by visiting [washington.edu/news/2002/04/18/wildflower-seed-mixes-full-of-weed](http://www.washington.edu/news/2002/04/18/wildflower-seed-mixes-full-of-weed).

Common fast-growing species in wildflower packets include these naturalizing, non-native plants:



Orange Hawkweed



Bachelor Button



Butterfly Bush

“Naturalizing” means they spread like wildfire and take over woodlands, prairies, stream sides and wetlands. Some of these packeted plant seeds may be considered as invasive or noxious weeds. Many noxious weeds threaten public health, the environment, wildlife habitat, forests, agricultural areas and recreational areas.

Why does it matter if I plant non-native or naturalizing plants?

Nonnative/invasive plants are fast growing and can take over an entire ecosystem. As they spread, they outcompete, or crowd out native plants leaving no room for them to grow. Invasive plants, like English ivy, can harm and kill large trees. Our native plants play a critical role in our ecosystem as important food sources for birds and other wildlife, as well as treating polluted stormwater runoff helping to keep our local waterways clean.

Naturalizing:

When a plant or animal from another region successfully establishes itself in a new environment.

Noxious weed:

Invasive, non-native plant that threatens agricultural crops, local ecosystems or fish and wildlife habitat. Noxious weeds include non-native grasses, flowering plants, shrubs and trees, and aquatic plants that invade forests, wetlands, rivers, lakes and shorelines.

The True Cost of Wildflower Mixes

It is estimated that the United States spends \$185 billion per year trying to remove invasive species. The State of Oregon spends \$46 million a year fighting one plant species: Scotch Broom. The more non-native species that are introduced and spread, the more money is spent trying to control and remove them, while native plants and wildlife decline due to loss of habitat and food sources.

What can you do?

If you want to add some colorful flowers and pollinator friendly plants to your yard, don't reach for the wildflower seed packets. Instead, plant native species or ornamentals known to not naturalize.

To learn more about natural gardening and lawn practices visit streamteam.info/native-plants or streamteam.info/native-plants-reference-library.

Source: Stream Team News, Spring 2022