



## Scatter Gardens

by Nancy Hawkins, UC Master Gardener

Are you what I call an “accidental gardener”? You don’t want to spend a lot of time working in your garden, but want the “WOW” effect in a garden plot. And, if you want the results to appear almost accidentally and randomly, then a “scatter garden” might be for you.

What exactly is a “scatter garden”? Picture informal patches of flowers started by scattering seeds over the soil and allowing them to create their own style and beauty. You can pick seeds of native California wildflowers, or seeds to attract butterflies or birds. Maybe you want flowers that are red, white and blue for a patriotic garden, or pastel flowers for a spring show. The choice is yours.

You will find neighbors can’t stay away, delivery folks stop and ask questions, and children want to gather bouquets. Beneficial insects are out in force and mini-wasps and bees are feasting on pollen and nectar. A “scatter garden” provides a welcoming oasis among suburban stretches of lawns and shrubs.



For the accidental gardener, planting a “scatter garden” requires minimal planning and work. Mail-order companies work best for the greatest selection in seeds. But, if you are not fussy and time is short, many local garden centers, discount stores, and even grocery stores have racks of seed packets. In our area, early spring is the best time to sow the seeds for summer bloom. A rough diagram is helpful if you have picked seeds of short, medium, and tall heights or have a certain color scheme in mind.

Locate the planting bed in well-drained soil in full sun. Remove rocks and weeds. For greater success, work in two inches of organic matter. The size of the bed is up to you and the space you have available.

Scatter the seeds thinly, two to four inches apart. Tiny seeds can be mixed with sand to facilitate sowing. Cover the seeds lightly with soil, rake in, and tamp down gently. Water well and keep the soil moist until the seedlings sprout. Try to time the sowing of seeds when natural rainfall can help them establish. It is important to keep the seeds evenly moist while they are germinating.

As plants grow and mature, they will flower in succession and bloom much longer if watered regularly. In this year of drought and possible watering restrictions, choosing seeds of plants that have low water requirements or are California natives would be wise. Seeds can also be planted in containers or window boxes.

At the season's end, allow spent flowers to form seed pods. Mow or use a weed trimmer to cut plants back to two to three inches above the soil line. Plants will reseed themselves for blooms the following season, a real bonus for the accidental gardener!

Seed mixtures are available in packets or kits to attract novice and expert gardeners, and flying creatures too! The garden that attracts butterflies uses a variety of flowers such as the Alyssum, Cornflowers, Cosmos, Echinacea, Larkspur, Nasturtium, and all types of Sunflowers and Zinnias.



To attract birds, choose packets containing Clovers, Coneflowers, and Sunflowers. Birds are attracted to their seeds and nectar. The hummingbird garden contains seeds that will bloom into pink, lavender, purple and blue bell-shaped flowers, such as Baby's Breath, Bachelor Buttons, Clarkia, Four O'Clocks, Morning Glory, Nasturtium, Penstemon, Salvias, Sages, and Zinnias. I even found packets containing a perennial mix and a cut flower wildflower mix.

Whether planted in the yard or in containers, your "scatter garden" will create a vibrant spectacle that would make any gardener proud and flying creatures happy. So, all you accidental gardeners out there, take the plunge, and try your hand at creating a "scatter garden".

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