

# Native Plant Seed Sowing and Care Guide

Thank you for participating in the launch of Partnerships for Parks' Native Plant Initiative! Adding native plants to neighborhood parks will provide additional habitat and food sources for pollinators and birds and enhance ecosystem resiliency across our city. This guide will show you how to create a local buzzing meadow on NYC Parks property from start to finish.

## What's the Hype about Native Plants Anyway?

Native plants have evolved over thousands to millions of years to thrive in the climate and soil conditions of a particular area. NYC has about 1,300 plants native to the five boroughs! Over the long term, native plants require less resources to thrive - less water and no fertilizer. They also improve soil health, reduce erosion, and provide food for native insects; especially pollinator species and birds, which eat many of these same insects and seeds of some of the plants. Landscapes with diverse native plants are also more vibrant and alive - full of insect sounds, bird sounds, and movement - just the way nature intended.

## Step 1: Determine an appropriate planting location

Your packet has enough seeds to cover a 10' x 10' planting area. Meet with your Community Engagement Coordinator and Parks and Recreation Manager (PRM) and/or the park's gardener to discuss locations where these seeds could thrive. You'll want to choose a plot (or multiple areas) that is clear of other plants and has plenty of sun throughout the growing season. Once the native seeds start to germinate in the spring, they may look like weeds and could easily get trampled on or mowed over. To avoid this, work with Parks staff to clearly mark the planted areas. Horticulture beds that are already fenced off are a great choice for planting. Spreading mulch around the plants can make the area more identifiable and an official Parks sign stating, "Do Not Mow. Planted Area." will ensure staff are aware that your seeds will be growing into desirable plants in the spring (ask your PRM to install). If a suitable growing location in your park cannot be found, you may opt to plant the seeds around nearby street trees. Click [here](#) for more information.

## Step 2: Pick your It's My Park (IMP) planting day

Select dates between mid-November and mid-December in your [Project Leader Application](#) (This is the best time for planting native seeds!)

## Step 3: Prepare the soil

During your IMP project, you'll need to spend a little time preparing the soil for your seeds:

- Remove all above ground plants and thin roots from the area and loosen the soil about 6" deep with a round-pointed shovel and fork.
- Any bulbs found in the area can be left in the soil but should be covered to avoid planting on top of them and creating competition for your native plant seeds.
- Create a loose, airy soil by breaking up any remaining compacted chunks using your hands and shovel.
- Lastly, work organic material, such as broken up leaves or compost (if available), into the loose soil.

## Step 4: Sow the seeds

Sprinkle the seeds (in combination with coarse sand, if available) by hand across the planting area(s) in a consistent pattern, keeping seeds fairly close together (about 1/2" to 1" between seeds will work well). Next, walk across the seeds to compress them into the soil. You can also cover the seeds with a light sprinkling of soil to prevent them from getting eaten by birds.

## Step 5: Document your work

Take photos throughout your planting and caring process and share them with your Community Engagement Coordinator and [itsmypark@cityparksfoundation.org](mailto:itsmypark@cityparksfoundation.org). Also let us know you've successfully planted your seeds by choosing "seed packets" in the horticulture section of your It's My Park Outcomes Form.

## Step 6: Care for the sprouts

Your seeds should sprout in early spring, possibly in early March. To help ensure their survival, try to water them if there are dry spells throughout the growing season. Some of these plants may not flower until the second year, so only remove the weeds you can identify to prevent removing the native plants.

## Who's Who in Your Seed Packet

Golden Alexanders  
*Zizia aurea*



Grows 1' to 2' tall with bright yellow 3" to 4" inch clumps of tiny flowers that bloom April through August. Prefers moist, sandy soils and partly sunny to sunny conditions. Provides nectar to many short-tongued insects, and is a host plant to the black swallowtail butterfly.

Wild Bergamot  
*Monarda fistulosa*



Grows 2' to 4' tall. In the mint family with aromatic leaves. Pink to purple pom-pom like flowers bloom from May to October. Tolerant of various soil types, and prefers medium moisture levels, with sun or partial shade. Attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

White Star Aster  
*Eurybia divaricata*



Grows up to 3' tall with clumps of small white-petaled flowers with yellow or red centers. Late blooming from August through November. Naturally found in open woodlands and prefers dry and slightly acidic soil. Prefers some shade. Flowers attract butterflies and bees and seeds are a food source for birds and small mammals.



New York Ironweed  
*Vernonia noveboracensis*



Grows in clumps, up to 5' to 7' tall. Flowers are purple and bloom August through September. Found in wet and open fields. Flourishes in moist clay soil. Prefers full sun. Pollinated by butterflies. Seeds are eaten by birds in the late fall.

White Vervain  
*Verbena urticifolia*



Grows up to 5' tall. Flowers are white and relatively small. Found in woodland edges, fields, roadsides, and other disturbed areas. Prefers partial sun and moist or partially moist soil. Pollinated by short and long-tongued bees, wasps, butterflies, and flies. Leaves are eaten by various insects. Seeds serve as food for birds in the fall.

Smooth Blue Aster  
*Symphyotrichum laeve*



Grows up to 4' tall. Found in woodlands, roadsides, rocky or dry soils and fields. Prefers full sun. Is tolerant of drought and partial shade. Attracts bees and butterflies and is a larval host to the pearl crescent butterfly.

Purple Love Grass  
*Eragrostis spectabilis*



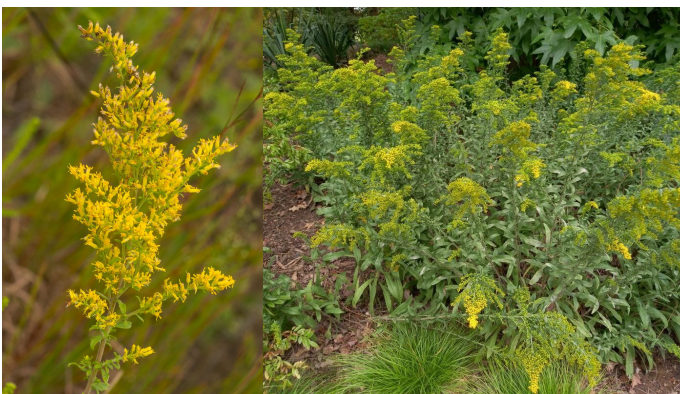
Grows up to 1' tall and 1' wide. Individual leaves turn purplish-pink at the end of summer. Likes well drained soil with lots of sun. Serves as a host for the paradoxical grass moth and is eaten by leafhopper insects. Birds use it in nesting material.

Foxglove Beard Tongue  
*Penstemon digitalis*



Grows up to 3' tall with white to pink tubular flowers that bloom April through July. Prefers fertile soil and can tolerate some drought. Does well in partial shade and sun. Attracts many different types of bees and hummingbirds.

Gray Goldenrod  
*Solidago nemoralis*



Grows up to 1 1/2' to 3' tall. Slender, gray-haired stalks produce small yellow blooms June through October. Plant is naturally found in open woods and prairies. Hardy plant that can grow in varied soils and sunlight levels. Supports butterflies and bees. Birds eat the seeds.



Roundhead Bush-clover  
*Lespedeza capitata*



Grows up to 2' to 4' tall with clumps of three fine-haired leaves. Flowers are small, greenish white, grow in clumps, and bloom July through September. Naturally found in sand dunes, open woods, and roadways. Hardy plant that can handle drought, well-drained soil, and lots of sun. Host and nectar source for butterflies. Seeds are consumed by birds.

Black-eyed Susan  
*Rudbeckia hirta*



One of our most recognizable native flowers. Grows up to 3' tall with 2" to 3" wide, daisy-like yellow flowers with a dark center. Prefers well-drained soils, full sun, and medium moisture levels, but is also drought tolerant. Blooms June through September and attracts butterflies and birds.

Common Milkweed  
*Asclepias syriaca*



Best known of the milkweeds with large opposite leaves. Typically grows 3' to 5' tall. Five-petaled white, pink, or purple flowers bloom in a spherical formation June to August. Important host plant for the endangered monarch butterfly. Also attracts other butterflies and bees. Milky sap contained in the vegetative parts of the plant can be toxic in large quantities.