



# UTAH POLLINATOR HABITAT PROGRAM

## NATIVE SEED PLANTING GUIDE

### WHEN TO SOW SEEDS

It is best to plant native seeds in the late fall/early winter so they can undergo natural processes needed for best germination rates. Sow your seeds in **late October or early November** after your area has experienced several hard frosts and freezing nights. Soils should cool to well below 55 degrees so that your seeds don't sprout prematurely. You could also wait until snow is predicted and scatter the seed before the storm.

Another option would be to save all or some of the seeds for spring planting. This option would require an extended period of cold stratification, depending on the seed type. *See the individual species pdfs on the website for more information on stratification needs (<https://ag.utah.gov/farmers/conservation-division/pollinator-habitat-seed-mixes/>).* Cold stratification methods can be found on the internet but typically require a cold period (like refrigeration) of about 6 weeks for most species.

### REMOVE EXISTING GROWTH & PREPARE THE SOIL

Remove any existing lawn grasses and weeds so that your seeds have the space and nutrients they need to grow without competing with other plants. Several methods are available to clear your site of existing growth: smothering using a permeable substrate (like cardboard or newspaper), solarizing using clear plastic and burying the edges for 6 to 8 weeks during the heat of late spring/summer, hand weeding, or careful use of herbicides.

### PREPARE THE SEED BED

Once the existing plants have been killed off, turn over the soil before planting the seeds. Do this several times to encourage weed seed germination in advance of planting. After the final tilling, rake the area to break up the dirt clods and create a smooth, even-textured soil surface.

### SCATTER SEEDS EVENLY

Scatter your seeds by hand for even distribution (unless you are seeding a very large area). Use dry sand (such as bagged, sterile playground sand) to mix in with the seeds at a ratio of 1 cup of seeds to 8 cups of sand. This helps more evenly distribute the seeds when broadcasting them onto the soil.

## COMPRESS SEEDS INTO THE SOIL

Good soil to seed contact is important for successful establishment. Once the seeds have been sown, press the seeds into the soil to ensure maximum germination. This is better than trying to cover the seeds with soil. A good method is to use a small 2 ft x 2 ft piece of plywood or cardboard to stand on to firm the soil around the seeds.

## WATERING YOUR SEEDS/NEW SEEDLINGS

The seeds need to stay consistently moist from germination until they are about 4-6 inches tall, typically 4-6 weeks. However, with fall/winter seeding, most locations will not need supplemental watering. Beginning in mid-spring and into the summer, water the emerging plants until the roots become established. Most species will need little water by mid-summer.

## MAINTENANCE & WEED CONTROL

Diligent weeding will help to encourage healthy growth of your native plants. Be sure you can identify seedlings of the seeds you sowed so that you don't remove them by accident. It might be helpful to mark your seeded areas with flags or potting tags, labelled with the name of the species that you incorporated into your mix.

- **Hand Weeding.** The best method of weed removal is to cut the plants off just below the soil line instead of pulling the weeds. Pulling weeds disturbs the soil and creates a new seedbed for weed seeds to germinate.
- **Mowing.** Mowing larger areas during the growing season is a great option to help your seeds get established by minimizing competition. You can use a lawn mower or string trimmer. Set the mower deck to a height of 4 to 5 inches and mow when the weeds reach about 8 inches tall. Repeat as needed through the first growing season. If weeds persist during the second year, additional mowing will be helpful.

**\*\* Patience is essential since seeding with native plants can take time -- even as long as three to four years. \*\***