

Wildflowers: Naturally the way to go

(Continued from page 27)

ground cover and they won't even show.

Try planting some of these beautiful and too infrequently used small bulbs next fall: grape hyacinth (*Muscari*), Siberian squill (*Scilla Siberica*), Scotch blue bells or wood hyacinth (*Scilla Hispanica*), snow drops (*Galanthus*), glory-of-the-snow (*Chionodoxa*), *Leucojum*, and the ever delightful crocus.

To move up from the simple naturalized garden described above to a "miniaturized woods," one can add the native wildflowers to the ferns and bulbs. Such a naturalistic planting gives one a

feeling of ecological fitness, as it is not too tame nor too orderly. It just blends and harmonizes with greater landscape, that beyonds one's own garden.

Minimum maintenance is one of the chief attractions of this kind of gardening. Wildflowers are almost self-supporting. They never need spraying, fertilizing is not even generally recommended, and they want considerably less watering, thinning or handling than most flowering plants. Spring "wildings" save the gardener time, money and work. Once established, they are almost carefree and will perpetuate themselves for years.

Location and light requirements are important. Spring wildflowers appreciate the early spring sunshine, but as the days become hotter, light shade as found in a hardwood forest, is necessary to keep the soil cool. The north or east side of the house usually provides adequate protection.

Soil is another important factor. A good supply of humus, such as decaying leaves, pine needles, peat or compost, is necessary to create the acid condition required for success with these plants. Liberal and continuous quantities may be necessary to keep the soil high in organic matter that will hold moisture.

Wildflowers do not transplant easily. Digging a large ball of surrounding soil is helpful and not planting too deeply is essential to a successful transplant.

Fall planting is generally recommended over spring planting. Newly moved plants establish themselves during the moist days of fall and then like to go into winter with protective mulch. The mulch may be left on the bed undisturbed in the spring as the decaying leaves and other organic material only further enriches the soil. If any plant has to struggle to grow through the mulch, it is wise to remove it from around the crown, and the same applies to all the bulbs.

Nothing more is required of the gardener during the year except occasional extra watering in the summer. And when the season is over, that part of the garden must be allowed to lie fallow for another year, since there is a cycle in nature that must not be disguised. This quotation is from Vita-Sackville-West's "The Joy of Gardening," which I recommend for your garden library.

Let me suggest that in the beginning your wildflower garden should consist mostly of highly reliable plants. Each year you can add a few new ones which may be more difficult but which may appeal to you.

Easy-to-grow wildflowers (common names) are: Bloodroot, Great Solomon-Seal, Hepatica, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, May-Apple, Spring Beauty, Trillium, Violets,

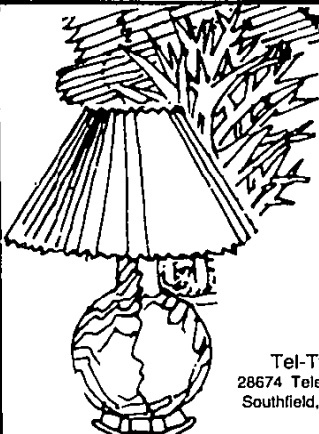
Virginia Blue Bell, Wild Geranium, Wild Ginger and Wild Phlox.

In addition to these true wildings, there are many familiar perennials that fit in and are readily available at the local garden centers. I suggest you include forget-me-nots, primroses, buttercups, lily-of-the-valley or the always charming pansies which will give continuous color until the weather turns hot.

Many of our native flowers are rapidly disappearing and there is an expanding list of endangered species. All members of the Orchid, Gentian and Trillium families are on the Michigan prohibited list. This means that it is illegal to pick or dig up any of these plants without the written permission of the owner of the land.

Many local collectors have followed the bulldozers and cranes into areas that are being developed and literally saved hundreds of plants from being destroyed. Each spring, volunteers from Cranbrook House and Garden Auxiliary collect a variety of wildflowers from such areas for their Spring Plant Sale. This year the sale will be held on May 19 and 20 at Cranbrook Greenhouse, 380 Lome Pine Rd., Bloomfield Hills. I am sure that many of the above listed specimens will be available for sale. Some local nurseries are beginning to offer wildflowers and ferns and there are several mail-order nurseries that specialize in native plants.

— MARGE ALPERN



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