



A week devoted to wildflowers is just about as good as a holiday devoted to trees. While Arbor Day is a well-known holiday celebrated across the state, Nebraska Wildflower Week should be celebrated just as much.

Wildflowers and native plants can be unique and interesting additions to the landscape. What is the difference between native plants and wildflowers? The terms “native” and “wildflower” are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Native plants in the Great Plains are generally described as those found growing in a defined area prior to European settlers. Wildflowers are described as flowering plants that grow with little or no human help. They can either be native or introduced, or brought in from other areas. Both wildflowers and native plants work well in low maintenance areas and in sites that need hardy, drought tolerant plants.

“Wildflowers endure through hard times, lending beauty and brightness even to landscapes rarely seen by human eyes. Their flowers and seeds feed birds, butterflies and other wildlife; their roots loosen and improve soil; and they lend fragrance and beauty to wild places, making us want to take a closer look at places we might otherwise ignore.” Nebraska Statewide Arboretum.

Elizabeth’s Top 5 Wildflower Picks of 2017:

White Prairie Clover (*Dalea candida*)- This native, 1-2’ tall plant is covered with white blooms in June and July.

Not only are they a true white flower, they also attract butterflies. When in bloom, the flowers almost look like big Q-tips in the landscape.

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)- This standard wildflower is common in many landscapes. It is a tough plant that is tolerant to a wide range of growing conditions. The yellow-gold flowers with dark centers, or eyes, peak bloom is in June-July, but they can also continue to bloom into the fall. The flowers make great cut flowers.

Spiderwort (*Tradescantia bracteata*)- A fun plant with an even better alternative common name of ‘cow slobbers.’ *Tradescantia* gets its common names from the gelatinous, slimy, goo that is released when the stem is cut or broken that resembles spider webs or cow slobbers. The three pedaled flowers come in colors ranging from blue to purple to pink in May-June. This plant is one that can handle the moist sites in the landscape.

Wild Indigo (*Baptisia* sp)- A cool plant that forms a rounded ball of green foliage 2-5’ tall depending on the cultivar. When in flower, it sends up blue, that’s right, I said blue, spikes that are followed by bean pods. When the pods mature, they turn black and when allowed to stand throughout the winter, they add a little interest.

Purple Poppy Mallow (*Callirhoe involucrate*)- This plant doesn’t get enough credit. In some sections of the state, ‘wine cups’ are seen as a weed rather than a landscape plant. This low growing, groundcover adds an additional layer of plant material in sunny sites. The crimson, purple cup-shaped flowers appear in June-July and are hard to miss among the finely dissect leaves.

This is just a sample of my favorites, but there are many more interesting wildflowers to learn about. More information about wildflowers can be found in a Nebraska Extension NebGuide, a University publication, ‘Wildflowers for the Home Landscape’. Go to <http://extensionpubs.unl.edu/> and search for the keyword ‘wildflowers’.

The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum serves as coordinator for statewide Wildflower Week activities, bringing together organizations that recognize the value of wildflowers. View the 2017 Nebraska Wildflower Week events statewide and resources here: <http://plantnebraska.org/news-events/wildflower.html>

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