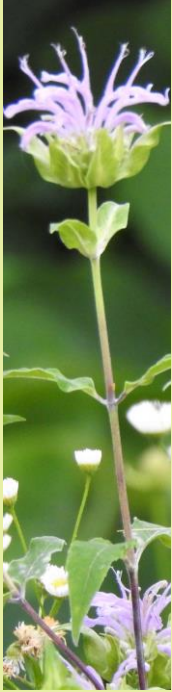


A Little Fall Prep Work Makes It Easy to Add a Low-Maintenance Native Plant Area in Your Yard



from Judy Johnson, TCAS Native Plant Sale Coordinator

Each year I am asked what plants would create a “no maintenance” garden. That is not possible. However, the choices at the annual native plant sale are robust plants that can result in a low maintenance garden.

Planting this garden is also easy. The trick is in preparing the area correctly in the fall. You will not need to dig up the soil (unless you have bulbs/woody plants) or till the area. No chemicals will need to be used.

Note: Before selecting plants, check the descriptions to be sure you choose the right plants for the sun, soil, and moisture conditions in your new native plant garden location.

*Links to plant descriptions and photos are on the Thorn Creek Audubon website at:
<https://www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org/native-plant-sale>*

Directions for Preparing Your 3 ft. x 4 ft. Garden Area in the Fall

In early October or when leaves begin to fall:

Step 1: Choose an area about 3 ft. x 4 ft., which is 12 sq. feet. A sidewalk square is 5 ft. x 5 ft., so you do not need a big area. If choosing a larger area, an area 3 ft. x 8 ft. (24 sq. ft.) will be easier to work with than 4 ft. x 6 ft. (also 24 sq. ft) because you can work from the edge rather than needing to get into the center of the garden. However, any configuration is fine. A wavy edge is generally more pleasing to the eye than a very square border, but that is your own esthetic choice.

Step 2: If the area has woody plants, dense bulbs such as day lilies, or rocks, you first need to remove them. If you cannot remove small rocks, the area will not be appropriate. Also, remove any plastic or landscaper fabric.

Step 3: Cut leafy plants and turf grass down to the ground or mow as low as possible.

Step 4: Surround the area with temporary wire fencing about 12” high. If one or more sides of the area are against a wall or fence, this can be used instead of fencing those edges.

Step 5: Put down 3-5 layers of newspaper and wet with a hose/bucket/watering can.

Step 6: Immediately cover the newspaper with a layer of leaves. The layer will need to be heavy enough to keep newspaper in place. If the newspaper needs more to hold it in place, put a few large rocks or bricks on the newspaper. These will be removed in spring during planting. **DO NOT** place plastic/rocks in area.

During the fall: Continue to cover with leaves and (if wanted) coffee grounds, etc. Do not use yard debris that contains weed seeds. Do not use yummy kitchen peels that might attract animals to dig up the area.



Keep adding leaves until the pile reaches the top of the 12" fencing. You will notice that it will continually compress and allow more to be piled on top.

Winter: Let it be as nature finishes the prep work for you. You will notice it compresses.

Spring: The area will probably be about even with the soil level. Do not turn over the soil or remove the newspaper. Just plant directly into area. Tip: Leave tags near the plantings so you can identify them.

Keep new plants watered for 6-8 weeks, allowing them to establish root systems. Although there will probably be very few weeds, remove unwanted plants (weeds) as needed.

Questions are welcome! Email questions to: TCASplants@gmail.com.

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