



My Pollinator Garden Surprise

From Seed Collection to Planting

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Since the age of 8 I have had my own vegetable garden. Though, the extent of my flower knowledge was limited to the zinnias and sunflowers I would plant in my garden, and the few daffodils, Lily of the Valley, Irises, and Peonies that my mom grew.

As I became an adult, my understanding and passion for farming, gardening, and wildlife magnified as I studied natural resource planning and management in college and went on to work for the USDA. After retiring from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), I was fortunate to get hired by Pollinator Partnership, where I have been able to use my conservation planning experience and knowledge of Farm Bill programs to help folks who want to create large (½ ac or larger) pollinator meadows participate in USDA programs to help establish them. I also help train government officials on pollinator habitat installation and plant identification.



Figure 1

To brush up on some of my Ohio wildflower ID and gather some photos for an upcoming training event, I arranged to go on a wildflower walk with one of my colleagues. It was

later in the fall, so all the plants had gone to seed. With permission, I collected a few seed head samples of each of the species on the well-established site. All the seed heads were all placed in one unlabeled bag, photos and notes from my training tucked away for future reference. Later in the winter, I revisited my collection to refresh my memory, only to find the seed pods crumbled and unrecognizable. So, I did what most gardeners love to do...I decided to sow the seeds! Many native wildflower seeds require a process called cold stratification. In nature this happens over winter, where cold moist conditions wear down the outside seed hull allowing for germination in the spring. For tips on stratifying seeds, [check out this article](#) published by the University of Illinois Extension.



Figure 2

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After cold stratifying my seeds, I planted them in a seed tray to see what would happen. All kinds of seeds grew! I had little spiked monocotyledons (where the seedling leaf is singular not double), baby soft fuzzy leaves, smooth round leaves, and more!



I started my pollinator garden by planting these seedlings and supplementing with other seeds I did not already germinate. I know only some of these will bloom this year, since some of these plants take up to 3 years to get mature enough to bloom! As they grow and bloom, I will have fun identifying what species I have and becoming more familiar with plant identification during their different stages of growth in the process.

I am looking forward to my pollinator garden surprise, and watching all the pollinators visit my new garden. Each year for the next three I might get to see something new bloom!

If you are interested in creating a pollinator meadow or learning about some of the technical or financial assistance options that may be available in your area, contact one of the Pollinator Partnership Liaisons for your state! You can find more information at [NRCS Liaisons | Pollinator.org](https://www.nrcs.gov/fieldoffices/pollinator)

Figure 3

Image captions:

Figure 1 – Culver’s root and other seed heads ripe for collection

Figure 2 – My seed collection crumble, containing *Penstemon digitalis*, *Ratibida pinnata*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Pycnanthemum virginianum*, and several other species!

Figure 3 – A tray of surprise pollinator plants!

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