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For more information, contact Kenny Dodson
Horticulture Agent, Wildcat Extension District
dodsonke@ksu.edu, 620-670-5018

Prairie Blooms on Display

Looking along the highway, you might find many interesting things. From a plant perspective, many wildflowers are blooming, and many more will bloom later. They're easy to find in non-mowed ditches and fields. While they are called 'wild' flowers, some of them can find their place in the landscape, as well!

Currently, in the middle of summer, we are seeing some heat loving flowers as well as the last of the early season flowers. Some flowers that have been in bloom for a while now include coneflowers, coreopsis, and bee balm.

The native bee balm, *Monarda fistulosa*, is a messy lavender ball. This is a wild type of the cultivated variety and is actually called wild bergamot or mint-leaved bee balm. There are many kinds of coneflowers, which come in many colors; From the grey-headed and upright coneflowers of the *Ratibida* species, to the *Echinacea* that most people are familiar with. Many native *Echinacea* can be yellow, narrow-petalled, or less vibrant than the cultivated varieties.

Some summer bloomers, and occasional pasture weeds, include wild sunflowers, ironweed, and milkweed. Milkweed is a staple in any butterfly garden, given that it is the primary host plant for monarch butterflies. There are many species of milkweed, each with different blooming times, shapes, sizes, and even colors. The star milkweeds right now are going to be butterfly, common, showy, and swamp milkweed.

It's important to remember a few things when using a prairie flower as a landscape plant. Nearly all native perennial seeds require cold stratification, a cool period that simulates winter. Once the seeds sprout, these plants often grow much more slowly than typical ornamental plants. Natives and wildflowers can take several years to establish a good root system before they really take off. Lastly, any established tree or native should be stress tolerant, but they do need extra care while still developing.

Kansas has a bevy of native flowers that fill our borders. Whether you see them in the field or bring them into the garden, make sure you appreciate what flowers are on display this year.

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