

## Audubon at Home in Northern Virginia

### INSTALLING A NATIVE MEADOW BY SEED



#### Choose your site:

- **Size** – meadows don't have to be large, a small “pocket” or backyard meadow just 10'x10' can support an amazing amount of beneficial plants and wildlife
- **Look for a sunny**, visible, accessible spot
- **A partial-shade meadow is definitely possible**, but a little more difficult and will attract less wildlife
- **Different moisture/soil types** can be dealt with; there are plants that live in almost any soil
- **Your meadow will attract more wildlife** if it connects/abuts with another habitat or structure (pond, stream, marsh, forest, tree/shrub hedge, shelter belt, garden, split rail fence, stone wall, large rock or brush shelters, etc.)

#### Prepare your site:

- **If your site already has a good mix** of native species or if you're not sure what lives there, just let it grow and watch what develops for a season or two
- **If you have undesirable plants** growing on the site that you wish to replace with native meadow species you can remove them by several methods:
  1. smothering them with newspaper, plastic/tarp, woodchips/mulch, etc.
  2. removal by digging with shovels or sod-cutter
  3. using a string-trimmer to severely “scalp” undesirable plants down to bare ground
  4. using a single treatment of a low-percentage solution of Round-up (3%-5%), being sure to carefully follow the label's instructions and never apply herbicide on a windy or rainy day – herbicide is a last resort, but sometimes a useful option under certain circumstances
- **Seed-to-soil contact is essential**, so be sure to clear away all debris (turf/grass, leaves, thatch, etc.) until you have *exposed* soil
- **Use rake** to loosen and break up soil (no shovels/roto-tillers – they expose dormant weed seeds)

#### Mix and Apply seeds:

- **Best time for installing** a native seed meadow (i.e., best germination results) is Oct. thru December, but it can be done *anytime* of the year – February thru April is also good
- **Mix seeds thoroughly with peat moss** (the best) or with vermiculite, potting soil or sawdust
- **Use approx. 1 part seeds** to 5-10 parts mixing medium (peat moss, potting soil, etc.)
- **Spread/scatter seed mixture** by hand or spreader evenly over your prepared site
- **Mix/scratch seed mix into soil** with rake – do not turn soil or burry seeds (no digging)
- **Press seed mix** into soil by stomping with feet, tires, rollers, etc.
- **Spread/sprinkle very light layer** (1/2” or less) of straw (not hay), mulch or woodchips over your site – this light, scattered layer helps to trap moisture and protects seeds from extreme weather.
- **No need to ever water** – seeds will sprout/grow at their own pace when they get enough rain

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### Manage and Augment your meadow:

- **Remove invasive exotic plants** as necessary
- **Mow once a year, 11/01-3/15**, every *two* years, if there are no invasive exotics, briars, vines, etc. Mowing 2/1-3/15 is best – this leaves winter cover for wildlife. Leave bottom 3”-6” of plant stems *uncut* – many beneficial insects hibernate and/or lay eggs in lower portions of stems; also, many meadow plants have basal leaves that shouldn’t be cut. Rake off the cut/mowed stems to release new growth and scatter them on the edges of your meadow, woodland or on your stone/brush piles - those stems are full of beneficial insect eggs/pupae and wildflower seeds.
- **Add stone, log and/or brush shelters** to the edges of you meadow to attract reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals and hibernating insects (you can also use old pipes).
- **Add a small water feature**, a low bird bath or preferably, a shallow pool/puddle on the edge of your meadow will attract more wildlife, especially frogs, dragonflies and thirsty birds.