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Gardening

New book helps you go wild for wildflowers

NANCY SZERLAG

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Some call them weeds, but others treasure wildflowers. (Stock Xchange)

If cabin fever has you down and growing some wildflowers is on your wish list, Miriam Goldberger's new book, "Taming Wildflowers: Bringing the Beauty and Splendor of Nature's Blooms Into Your Own Backyard" (St. Lynn's Press \$18.95), is a must read.

In fewer than 200 colorful pages, Goldberger explains how to grow, design, decorate, arrange and love the flowers that were here when the Pilgrims arrived and deserve to part of any sustainable and healthy ecosystem. And her sense of humor and comfortable style of writing make it fun read. She's

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not a "my way or the highway" kind of gal.

Goldberger grows and sells her beloved native wildflowers, nonnatives and natives on her 100-acre Wildflower Farm in Ontario, Canada, so her advice comes from her experiences, not from other books.

Her listing of 60 perennials, chosen for their ease of growing, also includes the states in which they're indigenous and other important details.

While it's way too early to plant annual flower seeds — Jeff Ball and I always started our tomatoes and other annuals just four to six weeks prior to outdoor planting dates — Goldberger's method of planting perennials by cold stratifying them in the refrigerator for six to eight weeks is still doable.

Goldberger also gives a shout-out to the nonnative cutting garden she calls "her dirty little addiction." Think cosmos, zinnias and snapdragons. Her favorites are listed along with a quick paragraph on their needs — uber nutritious soil (compost), water, dead heading and more. But let's face it, all that effort is worth it if knock-your-socks off color is what you are looking for.

You really don't need a half-acre plot to grow these lovelies. Mixing wildflowers with veggies, adding them to perennial borders and sticking them in containers are all options, Goldberger says. And they attract important pollinators that keep the vegetables and fruits coming.

If there is a wedding in your future and the thought of using wildflowers as a theme is part of the mix, this is a perfect book to help you grow and plan your decor, and now is the time to start.

In the back of the book, Goldberger includes listings of wildflowers and native grasses by soil types that include clay, sandy dry and loam, so you don't waste your time planting something that will not thrive in your patch.

For more information, a resource guide and the selected bibliography for all the material used in this book, go to www.tamingwildflowers.com.

Nancy Szerlag is a master gardener and a Metro Detroit freelance writer. Her column appears Fridays in Homestyle. To ask her a question go to Yardener.com and click on Ask Nancy. You can also read her previous columns at detroitnews.com/homestyle.

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