

Project Wildlife: Bisbee

By Shannon Roberts, **Project Wildlife**

-protecting small flora and fauna of the Southwest

Propagating Wildflowers by Seed -- it's a breeze to do.

Gardening in our arid climate may be demanding, but gardening with wildflowers has many benefits for flora, fauna and us! Wildlife is faced with many challenges, including climate change, habitat fragmentation and pollutants. Planting native seeds provides forage for wildlife (large and small), erosion control, improved air quality, and increased biodiversity.

Our gardens also provide sustainable corridors for migrating pollinators. Bees and butterflies, as pollinators, move from plant to plant, searching for pollen or high-energy nectar to eat. We can help pollinators by sharing and spreading desert plant seeds. Three of my favorites to save and share are desert poppy, penstemon and blue flax.

The windproof blooms of **desert poppies** are vibrant yellow and orange, and last for weeks (though poppies are annuals and will not grow back from roots). They have hearty seed pods that are self-seeding and easy to collect. After the blooms fall, and before the plant completely dries out, pull the entire plant out of the ground. Next carefully pull each intact seed pod from the plant and place into a paper bag. Close the bag and leave the seedpods to dry for a couple of days. Each seed pod holds hundreds of poppy seeds and when dry, it is simple to see the separated seed pods. Empty the bag into a strainer over a dry glass wide mouth jar for storage.

Penstemons are another favorite for bees, birds and butterflies, with many varieties in a plethora of colors. These plants are perennials and will bloom year after year and are easy to duplicate in your garden by saving and spreading the seeds. When the blooms have fallen and you can see the seed heads, trim the plant to just above the leaves. Cut off the seed heads and store them in a paper bag to dry for about a week. After the seed heads are completely dry, burst by pinching to release the seeds (do this in the bag). Again, empty the bag over a strainer and save in a dry container.

Blue flax grows beautifully, and the seeds can be saved for spreading, sharing or eating. To save the seeds, grab a handful of stems at ground level, then pull the plants up by the roots and shake to remove excess soil. Gather the stems into a bundle and secure them with string or rubber bands. Hang the bundle in a warm, well-ventilated room for three to five weeks or when the stems are completely dry. Lay the dried

stems in a pillowcase and stomp the seeds or roll over them with a rolling pin. Open the pillowcase and let the seeds fly! This process works well when you want to broadcast the seeds to a wide-open space. You can also save these seeds for later in a dry container.

The best time to plant these wildflower seeds are either prior to the monsoons or in early spring after threat of frost. Watch for favorites among the bees and butterflies and collect those seeds for the future. Seeds can be collected from most desert plants. Seeds are also available at the Copper Queen Library. Never gather seeds in State or National Parks; collection on any public lands requires a permit. A good reference for additional information is: *Saving Seeds in the Southwest, Techniques for Seed Stewardship in Aridlands* by Joy Hought and Melissa Kruse-Peebles.

And...remember to share seeds with neighbors!

For more information or to get involved go to:plantnativeinbisbee@gmail.com

