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A Common Joy by Lydia Holley

I always wonder at the beauty of the common wildflower, Black-eyed Susan, or *Rudbeckia hirta*. Black-eyed Susan's came into my garden through the gift of a drifted seed. Easily taking root, it now multiplies wherever it finds favorable conditions. I have cherished this gift from nature for years now.



Black-eyed Susans are seemingly always happy and cheerful, blooming when Texas is at its hottest. A bright, yield-sign yellow, they invite the gardener to pause a moment to appreciate not only their simple beauty, but also to delight in the numerous pollinators that visit their blooms.

Although this wildflower is too coarse looking for some of the most refined areas in my garden, black-eyed Susan looks perfect blooming alongside the grasses and other wildflowers and forbs planted in the meadow area of my garden. They would also look right at home in an informal cottage style garden.

Fall blooming asters, tall purple liatris, swaying muhly grass with its pink plumes, Russian sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) with its soft lavender flowers, along with butterfly bushes (*Buddleia*) and coneflowers (*Echinacea*), both of which can be found in a rainbow of colors, make wonderful companion plantings to blooming black-eyed Susans. These companion plantings will also help highlight the dark dots of the textural seed heads of black-eyed Susans after they have matured.

Once you have black-eyed Susans in your garden, they will most likely self-sow. In fact, they may self-sow a little too well. If you want to add black-eyed Susans to your garden, the time to sow seeds is in the fall. Simply broadcast the seeds, then step on them to make certain they get good soil contact. If you are unable to sow seeds in fall, you may sow them in spring. However, like many wildflowers, black-eyed Susans need a scarification period, so refrigerate the seeds until spring.

If you add black-eyed Susans to your garden, or if you are gifted one by a windblown seed, this native American wildflower should bring years of joy to you and your garden pollinators.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.