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Wildflowers have to be tough plants to make it on their own on Arkansas roadways, so think how well they will do in your garden with just a minimal amount of care. If you are new to gardening, here are six tough performers, many of which are in full bloom right now.

Asclepias tuberosa or the butterfly weed is a member of the milkweed family and a host plant for the monarch butterfly. It is a showstopper in bloom. This plant is tough as nails and blooms for a long period of time. Plant it where you want it to stay, since it forms a taproot and is not easy to transplant once it gets growing. The plant has bright orange flowers and blooms from May through September provided you deadhead it. Deadheading means to remove the spent blooms to prevent them from setting seeds. Allow it to set seeds in late summer to early fall, and then save the seeds to plant in October to get more plants. While orange is the most common color, there are yellows, pinks and even bi-colors. It blooms best in full sun in well drained soils.

Coreopsis is another great group of perennial wildflowers. From tickseed, to moonbeam and lance-leaved, numerous colored varieties are now on the market as well. The original yellows are still the top performers, but the bi-colored 'Salsa' is a good variety too. All *coreopsis* plants thrive statewide in full sun. These drought tolerant plants also will benefit from deadheading to keep them blooming freely. Some of the newer varieties are self-cleaning, meaning they don't set seeds, but if you see seed heads forming, remove them during the growing season, and allow them to set seeds at the end of summer. Bloom period is from April through September depending on the species.

Echinacea or purple coneflower is one of the longest blooming wildflowers for full sun to partial shade. The original wildflower has pink flowers, but new varieties now make it available in red, orange, white, yellow and all shades in between. The common pink variety I believe is still our best performer. The first of the new colors, were more annual than perennials for us, but through plant breeding, new colors are lasting longer and performing quite nicely. There are also double and single flowered forms. Deadhead (remove the spent flowers) and it will keep the plant setting flowers instead of seed pods from June through October. With our mild conditions last year, we still had blooms in December.

Gaillardia or Blanket Flower is a long blooming wildflower. It likes it hot and dry and can bloom from early summer until frost. The daisy-like blooms come in a combination of orange, yellow and red and are a butterfly favorite. Each flower forms a seed pod, so dead-heading weekly will keep them blooming nicely. New varieties now offer solid yellow, red and orange blooms, along with doubles. Some blooms are frilled on the

edges while others have tubular blooms. These plants thrive in poor sites with well-drained soil in full sun.

Liatris commonly called Gayfeather or Blazing Star is a great mid-summer to early fall perennial with blooms in purple and occasionally white. This member of the aster family has spiked flower stalks which open from the top down. There are standard tall varieties which can grow up to 4 feet or more in height and dwarf forms getting no taller than 18-24 inches. They can be planted from seed, bulb or potted plants. They are extremely drought tolerant and bloom best in full sun. They are a favorite plant for butterflies, and birds feed on their seeds in the winter. Once you plant them, they pretty much take care of themselves, provided the soil is well-drained, particularly in the winter months.

Solidago or goldenrod is a proven performer for the late summer/fall garden. The showy yellow spikes of flowers do not make you sneeze—their pollen is too large to fly but they often get blamed for hay fever since they are much showier than the true culprit—ragweed. This long lived perennial is tough as nails and thrives in dry sites with full sun. The common variety may get too aggressive in a well-tended home garden, but look for some improved, more tame varieties like 'Fireworks' and 'Golden Fleece'.