



# BLOOMER ADVANCE

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## Local Family Featured In National Magazine



Submitted photo.

Steve and Janelle Sykora and their son Jesse amid one of the many fields of wildflowers they grow for seed in rural Bloomer. To learn more about their Everwilde brand of seed visit [www.everwilde.com](http://www.everwilde.com).

By Barry Hoff

*"Welcome to Jubilee Nursery in Bloomer, Wisconsin, where my wife Janelle, and I grow seed for native wildflowers. Our brand name is Everwilde. My name is Steve Sykora. Our story is probably somewhat different than many in Farm & Ranch Living." (August/September 2006)*

Thus opens the six page spread, featuring Steve and Janelle Sykora, in *Farm & Ranch Living*, a glossy 68 page magazine with 400,000 subscribers in the United States and Canada. From May 11 thru June 10, Steve kept a diary about life at his family's wildflower nursery which was featured in the August/September issue of the magazine which is published by Reiman Publications of Greendale, Wisconsin.

In the introduction to his journal Steve explains how he started his "farm" with 5 species on 1/10 of an acre on a 50 acre plot of land his parents purchased northwest of Bloomer.

From those humble beginnings his operation has expanded to 12 acres and about 100 species. The plants he grows are indigenous to the Midwest. Some being from Indiana and Iowa rather than all being from

Wisconsin.

Steve, who grew up in the Chippewa Falls area, has Bloomer roots going back several generations. Both of his grandfathers were dairy farmers along Highway 40 near Bloomer. In fact Steve's middle name is Ernest after his grandfather Ernest Sykora who, according to Steve, was always on the cutting edge of dairy farming. Ernest Sykora put in his first milking parlor in the 1940's and began using bunker silos in the 1960's.

Ernest Sykora's innovative spirit has carried over into his grandson Steve's wildflower nursery. Steve is not afraid to take on difficult varieties of wildflowers and grasses, trying right now to grow in cultivation a variety of grass the U.S. Forest Service harvested seed from in the wild.

The Sykora's Jubilee Nursery is the only Midwest grower of certain plants and even the first to successfully grow certain varieties in cultivation. They produce pounds of seed from at least one variety that before there would have only have been an ounce or two available.

For the first time this year Steve also experimented with planting plugs through a weed barrier fabric, even

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# Jubilee

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building his own tool to cut holes in the fabric for planting. The Pearly Everlastings (another project for the U.S. Forest Service) he planted in the fabric did well in spite of the drought this summer. The fabric is expensive but saves hours and hours of labor weeding and hoeing. He estimates that the fabric, which is supposed to last up to ten years, pays for itself in two to three years. "Essentially you are paying your labor out two or three years ahead," said Steve.

One advantage to wildflowers is that most varieties are perennials coming back year after year. The downside is that some varieties take a couple years to begin producing seed with some only coming into full production after five or six years. Most varieties get rotated out after five or six years.

An interesting side note to growing wild flowers is that the plant you have in cultivation one year can end up being the weed you are trying to get rid of the next year when you plant a different variety in that field. Steve tries to minimize that by keeping the ground worked for a year before planting something new into it.

Another "unique" aspect of growing wildflowers is that even a lack of rain can have an upside. Path Rush is a plant with a very small seed that doesn't grow very tall. During a "normal" year rain splashes dirt and sand up onto the plant. When the seed is harvested the grains of sand mix with the seed and because both are the same size it is impossible to separate the two making high quantities of high quality seed almost impossible to obtain. This year, because of the lack of rain, Jubilee Nursery was able to harvest 52 pounds of very clean Path Rush seed--at 1 million seeds per ounce that is a lot of seed. However, the drought did reduce the harvest among other varieties.

When asked what he does during the winter months, Steve replies that

he spends some of his time analyzing the meticulous records he keeps on every variety; the hours of labor, time of harvest, seed produced, etc. to figure out which varieties are most cost effective. He also admits that right now they are still in the "start-up mode" and he needs to work another job during the winter. However, in the future he hopes the nursery by itself will provide a living for his family.

Steve says, "I went into it for the lifestyle," and in *Farm & Ranch Living* he writes: "In the last few years, Janelle and I have worked together out in our fields. One of the main reasons I wanted to farm was to be with my family."

Up until this year Jubilee Nursery has sold of its seed wholesale to one main buyer. This year the Sykora's decided to break from that buyer and begin selling seed both retail and wholesale on their own.

Steve, speaking of the move into retail sales, says, "I enjoy seeing our product go to the end user."

Much of his retail business comes through the Jubilee Nursery's website at [www.everwilde.com](http://www.everwilde.com).

To read Steve's month long diary and learn more about Steve and Janelle Sykora and their wildflower nursery visit the local library and check out the August/September 2006 issue of *Farm & Ranch Living* magazine or order a copy at 1-800-344-6913.

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