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Iowa State Conservation Commission

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Evaluation of the Multiflora Rose Seed Planting Program for Wildlife in Iowa

PAUL LEAVERTON¹

Abstract. Plantings of *Rosa multiflora* have been made to provide economical, stock-proof, living fences. The earliest such planting in Iowa was made in 1930. Because the demand exceeded the supply of plants, the State Conservation Commission in 1950 initiated a multiflora rose seed distribution program to help satisfy the demand. A checkup on success of the program showed that only 4.5% of the seed were successfully grown and transplanted. Nevertheless, 244.8 miles of rose hedges resulted from the program. Cost to the Commission was \$8 per mile of established hedge.

Rosa multiflora is a thick, thorny, blossoming shrub that attains a height of 6 to 8 feet and a spread of 8 to 10 feet. It is a native of Japan, Korea, and parts of China. It was introduced to this country in the mid-nineteenth century and because of its hardiness was used extensively as root grafting stock for garden varieties of roses.

In the early 1930's, the Soil Conservation Service experimented with several kinds of plants for hedge fences that would take the place of the fast disappearing osage orange brought in by our pioneers. Multiflora rose showed best results and was recommended as an economical, stock-proof, living fence. As a result, it is now used extensively by farmers in the Eastern United States from middle Nebraska south through Texas and east to the coast. The use of multiflora rose as a farm fence also was a great boost to wildlife.

During the early years of introduction of multiflora rose for farm fences and wildlife cover in Iowa, 1948 to 1950, the demand for rose plants was greater than the State Forest Nursery could supply. In 1950, the State Conservation Commission began a free seed distribution program to help satisfy this demand. Anyone making application received a package of 1,000 multiflora rose seeds together with instructions for planting and transplanting to a permanent site for a farm fence. It was also felt that raising multiflora rose from seeds might revive interest in growing trees and shrubs from seeds.

To evaluate this program, questionnaires were sent out in 1954 and 1955 to all recipients of free seed from 1950 to 1952. This allowed time for one year in seed bed and one year for transplanting. The questionnaire asked for the number of plants that grew and the number transplanted to a permanent site.

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RESULTS

Twenty percent of these questionnaires were answered. Returns of 1954 questionnaires showed that 4.5% of all seeds sent out were grown successfully and were transplanted. The 1955 questionnaires showed that 6% of the seeds were grown successfully and transplanted. To project the success of the program, a 4.5% success figure was used (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the free multiflora rose seed distribution program in Iowa, 1950-1957

Year	No. packets sent (1,000 seeds per packet)	Number of plants grown and transplanted
1950	11,500	517,500
1951	7,064	317,880
1952	1,896	95,320
1953	3,311	148,995
1954	1,630	73,350
1955	2,907	130,815
1956	142	6,390
1957	50	2,250
Totals	28,500	1,292,500

Each packet cost 7 cents to process and mail. Total cost to the Department in 1955 was 1.54 cents per plant established or approximately \$8.00 per mile of established multiflora rose hedge. Based on average distance of 1 foot between shrubs, plantings from 1950 to 1957 totalled 244.8 miles of hedge. This program was worthwhile in helping to promote multiflora rose for wildlife cover in Iowa.

Of all seeds sent out, 80% were planted, and only 10% of these grew successfully. Successful growers followed through and transplanted to a permanent site in 75% of the cases.

By 1955 multiflora rose had become established in every county in the State. A letter was enclosed in each packet in 1955 on how to gather and grow your own seed. Also, news releases in the *Conservationist* and many newspapers carry this item each fall at seed gathering time. This may have been the reason for the reduction of applicants in 1956 and 1957.

It would be difficult to run a survey on this type of activity. However, there were a few reports on various clubs planning to gather seed and grow multiflora rose for wildlife cover. Perhaps those who have had success in growing their own multiflora rose from seed will have some influence in their community in getting more wildlife cover established.