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Wild, Wild Westerns

By Stephen Schochet

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In the early days of Hollywood, for studios like Universal Westerns were the easiest films to make. They required very few props and made use of the wide-open spaces available in the area. Even the smallest studio, sometimes an empty space between two buildings known as a lot, could easily film outside. It was a cheap and effective way to involve audiences in wild chase scenes involving pure heroes like the white clad Tom Mix going after dastardly villains. One time a theater was showing a Western, when the film suddenly broke right at the climatic scene. An emotional audience member yelled out, "Hurry up and fix it before they get away!"

The master of the Western was John Ford, who felt that the genre was the purest form of movie making. In 1956, he and John Wayne went to their regular spot the Monument Valley in Utah to make the powerful chase movie *The Searchers*. Location shooting allowed the two old friends to relax by camping out, playing cards and avoiding contact with the studio executives that Ford despised. The only problem was unpredictable Utah climate could delay filming. Ford turned to a local Navajo Medicine Man. "Sir I will pay one hundred dollars if you can accurately predict the weather." The Shaman shut his eyes went into a trance and said, "Rain!" Sure enough it did rain. The grateful director asked him to repeat his efforts the next day. "Mmm, cloudy!" Again success. But on the third day when asked the Medicine Man shook his head sadly and said, "Can not tell weather today" Ford's pipe fell out of his mouth. "Really. Why is that?" The Medicine Man replied, "Transistor radio broke!"

Ford's relationship with the Navajo in Utah was usually cooperative. He would offer them parts in films and generally provide a welcome boon to a depressed economy. In 1948, while filming another Wayne Western called *Fort Apache*, he hired two locals to create smoke signals. It took several hours but then finally the technicians finished the task. As the smoke arose from the ground the assembled cast and crew watched in awe. The silence was broken when one of the Navajo Extra's stated, "Wow, I wish I'd said that!"

Stephen Schochet is the author and narrator of the audiobooks "Fascinating Walt Disney" and "Tales Of Hollywood". The Saint Louis Post Dispatch says, "these two elaborate productions are exceptionally entertaining." Hear realaudio samples of these great, unique gifts at www.hollywoodstories.com.

Admiring Wild Flowers

By Jonathon Hardcastle

Walking with my family close to nature during late Sunday times has been a practice that I definitely enjoyed while I was a kid. Especially, if these long walks took place during spring time, I became extremely excited since I was able to admire all those wild flowers that attracted my attention and collect as many as I wanted for my bedroom's vase. As during the past few years I've read about, and have seen more interest in wildflowers, I figured it was about time to jump in and add my two cents.

Planting wild flowers in your backyard is not as an easy process as you might imagine. Just because the flowers you select to plant belong to the "wild" type that does not mean that they are able to survive without any attention or be sprayed with harmful pesticides.

First of all, the one interested in exploring the wild flowers business has to understand what kind of neighborhood wildflowers would be appropriate for the specific situation he or she lives in. It is true that wild flowers tend to prefer wide open spaces with at least 8 hours of sunshine each day. It is also true, they are sun worshipers. They also like the soil to be rich in nutrients and well drained. What wild flowers do not like is the hard packed soil and also being watered for long periods of time. If you garden tends to be frequently wet, wildflowers might not be the best choice for your outdoor surroundings.

But, wildflowers can be used for weed control and with a great deal of success. It is better though if you have to give wildflowers a start or the weeds will keep the area free from your original goal of a beautiful wildflower garden. Since both love the sun, weeds and wildflowers try both to reach the surface of the ground so as to gain as much sunlight as possible. Neither will grow well without adequate sunlight. Using this information to your advantage and you can end up with a beautiful bed of wildflowers that requires little maintenance.

The Wild Flower Preservation Society, whose headquarters are in Washington, D.C., makes the following recommendation to wild flower fans, "Do not pick or dig up wild flowers in quantity unless they are abundant or weedy. Wild flowers that are not abundant should be picked or dug up very sparingly." If the years I used to pick up wild flowers have long passed, perhaps it is time to grow some of my own in my back yard and share them with the people I care about. If you belong to the same group, there is always a good possibility we will meet in one of those flower markets, someday down the road.

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